

STAR DRIVE
ACCESSORY

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STAR COMPENDIUM




Science Fiction
Roleplaying Game

Systems of the Verge



David Eckelberry

ALTERNITY.

Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

STAR DRIVE.
ACCESSORY

STAR COMPENDIUM

talbot karnath dewi

eldala
vieron
tychus
VIRGIE
SYSTEMS
OF THE

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TSR 5318

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

THE STATE OF THE VERGE 5

InterVerge Relations	8
Getting Around	16

DEWI 18

History	18
Today	20
Belatu	22
The Dreth Commonwealth	23
Cadros	26
Amaethon	26
The Co-Orbiters	29
Caridwen	32
Gwydion	35
Dylan	36
Bran	36
Arianrhod	36
Pwyll	36
International Relations	37
Commonwealth Defenses	40
System Log	42

TALBOTT 43

History	43
The Planners	43
Construction Begins	46
Full Steam Ahead	47
Hanan	48
Blackmore	49
The Foucault Asteroid Belt	49
Thorn Shipyards	50
System Log	52

KARNATH 54

Human History	54
Bhruu History	57
Today	58
Luumun	62
Keehrun	62
Aaleemun	62
Bhruusil	62
Cheerghun	75
The Outer Planets	76
Karnath Defenses	77
System Log	79

ELDALA 80

History	80
Culture Clash	84
Danwell	87
Village of the Falls	88
Tavkath	90
Rivel	91
Stellar Relations	91
System Log	91

VIERON 93

History	93
At War	97
Corazón de Fuego	101
Tavira	103
Algeciras	106
Jaén	107
The Uninhabited Planets	108
System Log	109

TYCHUS III

Prehistory	111
History	111
Today	114
Government	115
Economy	116
Iron Mining	116
Yellow Sky	117
Empty Space	124
Tychus Defenses	124
System Log	128

Welcome to *Star Compendium: Systems of the Verge*, an accessory for the STAR*DRIVE® campaign setting and the ALTERNITY® roleplaying game. Whether you're new to STAR*DRIVE or a veteran of its stars, you'll find material to build your campaign, both expansion of existing information and whole new star systems for you to explore.

NEW TO STAR*DRIVE?

The year is 2502, and humanity has colonized a bigger and bigger chunk of the galaxy. Along the way, it has made contact with innumerable alien species even as men and women divide themselves between the great powers of the day: stellar nations composed of hundreds, even thousands, of star systems.

The Verge is a region of the frontier that has attracted a share of their interest. Located in prime interstellar real estate, the Verge became home to millions of colonists before humanity's great civil wars dissolved all contact. Today, more than a century later, the stellar nations have returned to their lost colonies, firm in their intent to bring the wayward children back into the fold . . . for their own good, of course. And while the various colonies try to determine their own destiny, they also tremble at growing news of the externals and their ilk, whose motives, leaders, and origins remain unclear.

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME BACK

As STAR*DRIVE's first year comes to its close, we can't help marveling at the incredible growth that it has seen. The Verge has grown and swelled already beyond our expectations, not just in published accessories and materials, but in a growing number of games at home and online, and a diverse base of fan support. From the troubling events and news publicized a few months ago in *Threats from Beyond* to the foundation of player-led creation of the Argos system, the setting continues to build, change, and evolve.

This product is about taking the Verge in new directions. It presents several new star systems, such as Dewi, Eldala, and Talbott, that you can use in your campaign. It also presents systems such as Tychus, Vieron, and Karnath that are likely locations of adventure in this year of exploration. The style of presentation is similar to that in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting and should join the material presented about the Verge therein. You should freely adapt, adjust, emphasize, or discard any material you wish.

In this first section of this book, you'll find information to help you in your campaign, no matter where it may

be based. There are details concerning the Verge-based governments and how they relate—or don't relate—to one another. Some of that is information about diplomatic ties, military alliances, and the deployment of military assets. There are also details about the continued increase in trade and commercial vessels in the Verge, including the arrival of major commercial liners in the region over the last year. No doubt many heroes will want to take advantage of the major mercantile traffic to help them traverse the region at a good clip. And thanks to piggybacking and the growing use of stardrive boosters, they may not even have to leave their starships.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

While you can use the information presented in this accessory to build upon any campaign setting, players in the STAR*DRIVE universe should have the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting and the ALIEN COMPENDIUM accessory. A few mentions of material described in the *Arms & Equipment Guide* and the *ALTERNITY Starships* accessory make those accessories a good idea, but not required.

Without the STAR*DRIVE setting, you'll have to create a setting and backstory, including your own empires, nations, and interests, that provide the heroes with the motive and means to explore these star systems.

Other than that, all you need to play is your imagination.

WHERE SHOULD YOU BEGIN?

Players can take delight in knowing that there's a formidable amount of information presented in the next one hundred and more pages, enough to fuel adventures over months and provide setting material for years to come. Just now, that may seem a bit daunting for someone hoping to take advantage of it immediately, without simply reading from cover to cover, or for those Gamemasters who, say, have a gaming session tonight for which they find themselves suddenly ill-prepared...

Each of the star systems described in the next few chapters contains at least one adventure hook, an outline for an adventure that should take little time to prepare. So, read over a single star system and the hook that accompanies it, jot down a few notes of your own, and you can be ready to begin in only an hour or two. For star systems that present some direct approaches, we suggest taking a look at Vieron, Eldala, or Tychus. Each contains obvious paths for your heroes to involve themselves in an adventure or two.

Wherever your journeys take you, remember to have fun and enjoy the mysteries of the future.

The Verge is a funny place, thanks to and despite all the attention it receives. First just a term to describe a specific region that happened to lie on the edge of a wide nebula, now "the Verge" has become vested with all sorts of meaning, all manner of interpretation, and all types of ambition. More than any other frontier, it reigns supreme in the minds of stellar nations as the frontier. The media can be blamed for some of that, as both newsnets and entertainment studios have focused on the Verge as a means to portray either a place of danger or merely a locus for representing anywhere that's not in settled Old Space.

The attention of outsiders seems actually to act in a competitive, building cycle. The aggression that many peoples of the Stellar Ring share makes them look for opportunities to compete, and the Verge is a likely place—a near-neutral ground over which to express their grievances. So when one group becomes involved in the Verge, it can encourage activity from another or multiple others, who themselves spawn off additional competitors: a chain reaction, a vicious circle.

That's not to say that for all the interested parties, life for Vergers has become somehow easy in the years since 2497. Although the stellar nations and their peoples may be more involved here than anywhere else outside their borders, no stellar nation has any illusions about the Verge's ultimate significance. At best, a few billion people live in the Verge, and the region could easily fit inside the confines of the smallest stellar nation several times over. Supporting and defending the burgeoning population of the Stellar Ring demands all of the stellar nation's resources. The crumbs that fall to the Verge from Old Space are just that: a mere fraction of a single percent of the total governmental expenditure.

So the Verge stumbles on. Maybe if a single nation such as the nearby StarMech Consortium—or even the illustrious Concord—had the energy free to devote itself fully to developing the Verge, it might someday achieve a measure of interstellar significance. It's still possible. Today, however, the Verge consists of hundreds of mostly independent enclaves, largely bereft of strong ties to one another or anyone. Like it or not, that will change.

THE FUTURE

"What does the future hold for me?" is a question that every sentient—excepting a few exceptional precognitives—asks itself. For Vergers, daily news stories pose the question collectively. For many, it's enough to be a Lison, a citizen of the Regency, or even a freeperson of Penates. There is no state beyond that of their own world, no starspanning giant, that can pretend to govern their lives, after all. To their advantage, the average Verge government is too concerned with supporting its people and a growing sea of immigration to

concern itself with managing the minutiae of its people. Small colonies may not have any significant form of leadership beyond a mayor or colonial council; they also lack for any protection against any threat, human or otherwise.

As Arrivers pour in their money and their people and their desire to control virgin territory, however, many Vergers have come to realize a need for something to be done. In some, this inspires support of political interest groups or even terrorist groups such as Concord Free Now. In others, this leads to allegiance to a single

stellar nation—VoidCorp, the Orion League, StarMech, or others—that they hope will play the role of uniting leader. The debate rages on in public forums, open Grid nets, and the bars and lounges on every street corner.

What, eventually, will the Verge become?

THE GALACTIC CONCORD

In name at least, the Concord is the state that has legal claim to administer the Verge, under provisions agreed to in the Treaty of Concord. As open space, the Verge is the Concord's to oversee as it sees fit—at least until such a time as it decides to incorporate the Verge, or any star system, into the borders of a stellar nation.

The Concord's real power to govern in the Verge is open to any number of challenges, however. Since the Verge predates the Concord's own existence, so do many of its systems. Many have preexisting claims for

CHAPTER

STATE OF THE VERGE



6
STATE OF THE VERGE

independence established during the Second Galactic War, and some have an even older claim made by one of the stellar nations. The existence of so many interests has helped to paralyze the Concord's ability to act. Additionally, it doesn't help that the Concord itself is made up of a collection of disparate interests that came together after the war. Whenever a Concordan makes a ruling that favors one side or another, his or her national origin is quickly raised as a question of conflicting interests. Plus, the Concord mission to prevent conflict can bind Concordan hands when intervention might seem the right course of action.

The unpopular decisions of Ambassador Oliver Mohan and Sector Administrator Julius Baynes, both presently on Bluefall in the Aegis system, have not endeared the Concord to many of the individual Verge systems. Although recognized among political and business executives of the Verge colonies for his ability to compromise and negotiate, Mohan often must accept the blame and condemnation for unpopular agreements. Meanwhile, the reclusive Baynes is best known as a severe executor of Concord law; his leadership of Administrators (nearly all of whom are Arrivers) in an unwavering pursuit of criminals (mostly Vergers) has not earned him any friends out in the Verge.

Despite this, the Galactic Concord forms the most practical source of Verge leadership and Verge government. After

all, the Galactic Concord's bureaucracy back in Old Space has proven remarkably efficient in answering the needs of a diverse population; internally, the Concord's three protectorates are administered well. Moreover, while the Galactic Concord has met with mixed reviews in the five years that it has been in the Verge, its most accomplished spokesperson has won the goodwill of Vergers everywhere. Michael Thayne has done much to answer the concerns of Vergers worried about the intrusions of stellar nations, putting a check on national interests, new colonial activities, and the law enforcement efforts of twelve different stellar nations. Most of the positive popularity that the Concord has comes from Thayne when he arrives in the *Lighthouse*, bringing gifts of political, economic, and recreational origin wherever he goes. Outside of the chief executives of individual Verge worlds, Thayne's name has the greatest positive exposure of anyone, according to pollsters.

From inside Thayne's circle of close advisors, it's rumored that Thayne, like many Vergers, is frustrated with the Concord's impotence and its inability to meet the needs of people throughout the Verge—housing, resources, and even basic liberties and freedoms. Because it's the only instrument around, Thayne wants to pressure the Concord leadership back home to take a more active hand in guiding the future of the region. One



news reporter speaks of a proposal to form a special fourth Concord protectorate, albeit with greater independence to find its own way internally and when dealing with foreign powers. The Verge governments would have wide latitude locally but would be ultimately responsible to the Concord protectorate's administration. It's a model found in both the Orion League and the Concord itself, and for many, the idea has merit. Its success in these two stellar nations, and the familiarity that people of many Verge systems have with it, make more likely its entrance onto the Verge political arena someday.

A NEW BEGINNING

For many, the idea of a new leadership from the Stellar Ring isn't worth discussing, much less considering. After all, the Vergers didn't sign this Treaty of Concord, no matter what it claims to accomplish. They weren't invited to the signing of this magnificent treaty, and their interests weren't represented. Why should they feel bound to follow the rules of such an agreement, even if it is represented by a seemingly benign Galactic Concord?

Ultimately, the question that some Vergers have to ask is whether they would want to be ruled one day from a world some thousand light-years away in the Stellar Ring, or from right here. Phrased like that, it seems like an easy choice to make. No distant government that's beholden to billions, even trillions, of people will ever put Verger interests first. Better to have a local government, even if it is a weaker one. The detractors of a Verge-based government can make some persuasive arguments of their own. After all, wasn't such an effort what the failed Verge Confederation was all about? How can a unified government emerge out of the chaos of individual Verge systems, planets, and colonies?

According to some theorists, many of them current residents of the Aegis system, in the short term the solution lies not in trying to forge some new state as the Verge Confederation might have attempted to do. The political will to carry through such an incredible effort, much like the creation of the Galactic Concord itself, simply doesn't exist in the Verge. Instead, certain proponents of unification make what is superficially a simple recommendation: Take the government that represents the largest and most heterogeneous population of the Verge worlds, and make it the *de facto* Verge government. They're speaking, of course, of the Regency of Bluefall.

The idea raises the issue of how much power the already glorified Christopher Hale should have, or even wants. Hale is an autocrat; as Regent he has a firm grasp of the reins of power on Bluefall. Liberal-minded Vergers wonder at whether the freedoms that the current Bluefall citizens have would continue and be extended to all Vergers should a "Verge Regency" ever arise. Christopher Hale denies that he has any interest in becoming involved in Verge leadership any more than he already has as the leader of one of the

TECHNOLOGICAL WINDFALL

Arrivers who come to the Verge wither under the communications blackout that plagues the region. Life without a drivesat seems unbearable to them, cut off not just by hours or days, but weeks or even months. Two parties have indicated an interest in changing the situation. Only a few months ago, VoidCorp announced its generous plan to contribute three functional, if used, drivesats to Corrivale, Oberon, and Algemron. They could be deployed within a year. Despite any misgivings that some may have about VoidCorp or its motives, the gift is so impressive, so incredible, that it can't be refused.

The Galactic Concord, despite its limited resources, has been pressed in the last year into promising the construction of a few mobile space stations equipped with drivesat platforms. They would function like the *Lighthouse*, although with living quarters for only a hundred or so and only 25 light-year stardrives. Plans call for beginning their construction next year with the first activation in early 2504 and continuing with one every six months until the last is delivered in 2506.

Assuming all goes well with the two initiatives, the Verge could be a different place to live in only five years. It will also mean an estimated 25% reduction in infotrading, but the number of small Verge colonies indicates infotrading won't be disappearing anytime soon. Plus, the arrival of improved communications should attract more immigrants and more resources from the Stellar Ring, bringing a rise in all forms of economic growth.

most prosperous and stable Verge systems.

Others ask what kind of status such a Verge state would enjoy. They'd still have to deal with the rest of humanity, and no one wants to support a fourteenth stellar nation, especially not the already-overworked Galactic Concord. For one thing, sympathetic Concordans such as Thayne have noted, the Treaty of Concord, humanity's new covenant, contains no provisions for the creation of a new stellar nation. Moreover, the present ones wouldn't allow a new government to rise up and displace or even appropriate their existing assets in the region.

If you listen to conspiracy hounds, the protests of powerful stellar nations may not matter much at all. Paranoid or prophetic, these choleric few say the externals, representing some collection of hostile aliens, will have their own voice in the deciding the events of tomorrow. In this future, the involvement of humans is limited to that of prey for the predator, food for the famished, or slave to the master.

INTERVERGE RELATIONS

For good or ill, the Verge in 2502 lies in none of the uniform visions described above, but in the reality of a collection of states of various power, each with their own likes, dislikes, and political inclinations. For Vergers, how the Verge governments get along with one another is more important than the web of alliances found back in the Stellar Ring. Most inhabitants of the Verge aren't likely to get involved in a feud between the Solar Union and the Thuldan Empire. They may, however, experience the effects of competition between Tendril and Bluefall.

TENDRIL

Everyone wants to get along with Alaundril's Common Council and the people the government speaks for. Tendril can claim not just one, but two economic monopolies. An incredible 90% of the traffic bound into or out of the Verge makes its way through the Tendril system; it is the principal distribution site for goods flowing to or from the Stellar Ring. At the same time, the Alaundrin shipyards represent the single largest source of manufacturing in the Verge. Vergers and Verge governments have little choice, the shipyards in Talbott notwithstanding, but to go to Tendril to meet many of their economic needs.

The Common Council of Alaundril, in coordination with StarMech, has the power to delay or even impound vessels bound to any point in the Verge, for testing, trade violations, or whatever excuse a bureaucrat cares to invent. The Alaundrin government is not above exercising this power for its benefit in negotiations or sovereignty debates, even if it amounts to extortion. As a result, most other Verge governments have mixed feelings toward the Tendril government; to many, the Common Council represents the worst of corporate control of a government. On the other hand, the Alaundrin government, like its StarMech patrons, throws some of the Verge's best social events.

Corrivale: Alaundril has little contact with either the Colonial Diocese or the Council of Tribes. Neither represents a significant market for manufactured goods, but the power of the Hatire Theocracy and widespread sympathy for the sesheyans keep the Alaundrin executives from ever irritating the denizens of Grith. On the other hand, the ubiquitous presence of VoidCorp market dominance precludes any idea of favoring the sesheyans publicly.

Lucullus: The posting of an Alaundrin ambassador in 2498 to Port Royal was hoped to foster better relations. Now, it appears to be the last-ditch effort to keep the two systems from outright conflict. The leaders of Alaundril have had no success dealing with the Lucullan League. Put simply, the League's refusal to guarantee the safety of shipping, the number of privateers flying Lucullan flags, and the League's refusal to sign any reasonable treaty allowing extradition of criminals makes the situation impossible.

Aegis: Historically, the Regency of Bluefall represents the single greatest challenge to Alaundril's economic dominance. As such, the two states have been competitors since Bluefall's recolonization. Publicly, Scott Williamson and Christopher Hale remain cordial. Privately, it's said that the two leaders loathe each other. Territorial issues, such as the Terivine system, promise to continue the rivalry of the two best-financed and best-equipped Verge systems.

Algemron: As is the case for many dealing with the Algemron issue, Tendril's relations with Galvin and Alitar are cleanly split. Although Tendril maintained a historic neutrality in the conflict ever since declaring its own independence, its sympathies are reserved for the Federal State of Algemron. Quiet support of the Galvinites has increased as knowledge of GW2 led Alaundril's population to loathe all things Thuldan. It's more this desire to see Thuldans fall and lose a war than support of the Galvinites that moves the populace. As for Alaundril's business leaders, they're quite willing to secretly assist in arms smuggling in exchange for a cut of the profits and a promise of future trade exclusivity contracts.

Oberon: Of all the major Verge systems, Tendril owes its best friendship to the somewhat distant world of Lison. While they've taken different paths on relations with stellar nations, and the political systems couldn't differ more, the financial and commercial ties between Alaundrin shipping and Lison mining make the two worlds natural partners. The relationship has grown so strong that the Common Council of Alaundril has, upon ULS request, frequently hampered Rigunmor shipping bound for Oberon.

Hammer's Star: The small market that Spes has to offer has attracted only a speck of interest from Alaundril. They've generally ignored the negotiations of Borealins for regular shipping schedules; most Alaundrins think it is too dangerous anyway. On the other hand, the Common Council has gone out of its way to appease the Star Force and Admiral Raastad during his two visits since 2499. The Common Council, as often observed, will do just about anything to keep the Concord happy these days.

CORRIVALE

Corrivale's internal strife, while not so hopeless as that of Algemron, casts long shadows over the way in which it deals with other Verge governments. Officially, all contact with Grith should go through the Colonial Diocese, the Hatire government given rights to the moon. In reality, the relations with other Vergers are always complicated by the interference of Vergers into "the sesheyan issue."

Tendril: Efforts by Aanghel Osui'ike to bring the Alaundrin economic might into support of sesheyan independence and even ownership of Grith have failed. As a result, the crime families of Grith have begun a campaign of quiet sabotage, attempting to poison Tendril's relationship with the Hatires and VoidCorp even while the sesheyans demonstrate strong interest in Alaundrin goods, hoping to increase the ties

between the two peoples. The Colonial Diocese, in the meanwhile, scoffs at the Common Council, sharing in the Thuldian contempt for StarMechans everywhere.

Lucullus: Surprisingly enough, mediation between the underworlds of Corrivale and Lucullus has been almost nonexistent. Distance is one factor; contempt is another. Most of the factions of Lucullus see the sesheyans as amateurs at best. At worst, they make the typical speciesist comments. Only with the Jamaican Syndicate has there been serious exchange. Mostly, this involves sharing information on opportunities for new capital investment (loansharking, protection rackets, and so on) throughout other Verge systems.

Aegis: The Colonial Diocese enjoys a warm reception whenever it visits Bluefall. The Regency's open religious policy, and its large population without religious ties, makes the Diocese itchy for conversions. The Regency has promised to allow the construction of Temples to the Cosimir on Bluefall. Meanwhile, all the openness chills sesheyans, who had hoped that Aegis might take a stand and publicly allow sesheyans refugees with protection guarantees. So far, Hale has yet to make such a promise.

Algemron: While the Diocese's leaders strongly support the Imperial State of Algemron, no one else in Corrivale has the desire or stomach to take a stand on the civil war.

Oberon: Without significant interstellar markets or the means to manipulate such markets, the Colonial Diocese has little say about the ULS, although the sesheyans of Grith like the spirited, if sometimes disorganized, resistance that the Lisons offer up to stellar nations that come calling.

Hammer's Star: Animosity between the Hatire leadership and the Borealins of Spes is mutual; in short-sighted fashion, the Hatire often argue against the deployment of so much Concord protection to the insignificant and unpopulated system. The sesheyans have no significant ties, other than to avoid dangerous Hammer's Star much like any other sane individual.

LUCULLUS

Since the Solars lost control of their prison colony, it has been the pariah of local Verge politics. Indeed, many blame the fractious Lucullan League for the failure of the Verge Confederation to bring any sense of community to the region. That's not surprising, since during its early days agents of the Verge Confederation often found work for law enforcement agencies seeking bounty hunters for Lucullan criminals. To this day, the League refuses to sign extradition treaties with any Verge government. Local law requires that a Lucullan must be tried in a Lucullan court, regardless of the location where the alleged crime took place; this law is universally ignored by the other Verge systems.

For the average citizen of Penates just hoping to get by, living in the Verge and traveling in it is a burden. There's the

instant assumption of a criminal mind; wherever they go, Lucullans must endure being watched by Verge law officers.

Tendril: The economic merchants of Tendril have something the Lucullans want: money. The unrealized potential of a criminal syndicate on Alaundril has every Baron's mouth watering. Yet making those inroads has proven difficult, since the Alaundrin Common Council has a firm stand-off attitude; as long as the League refuses trade and protection guarantees, Lucullan trade on Alaundrin is restricted and closely monitored. The Supervisors are the latest to lead a charge to change the minds of the Alaundrin leadership. Given their natural aptitude at that task, relations between the two worlds may change.

Corrivale: Occupied as it is by either religious zealots or paranoid sesheyans, Corrivale has nothing to offer. The average Lucullan criminal pities his Grith counterpart; there's really nothing on the jungle world worth having.

Aegis: For Aegis, the Lucullans reserve their greatest scorn and hatred. The Regency space navy made the eradication of piracy and criminal activity one of its first objectives, and it had the naval power to do it. The Regency has made no secret of the contempt that it feels for a planet run for, by, and with the support of escaped convicts. Angering Lucullans further is the willingness of Regency officials to descend to Penates to grab suspects—under the guns of cruisers, if necessary. Revenge, when the time comes, will be sweet.

Algemron: Even criminals can have some national memory, and though the Lucullans have little good to say about their former Solar jailors, they still remember the enmity reserved for Thuldans for the last 200 years. The Lucullans, barring political convention, have more or less openly thrown their support behind the Federal State of Algemron, heedless of Thuldian reprisals.

Oberon: Another untapped market. The unions on Lison are remarkably free of racketeering and organized crime influence. That's something that both the Jamaican Syndicate and the Supervisors would like to change. Skimming a bit of the profit from the lucrative rhodium business shouldn't be too tough after one or both of these groups manage to get their hooks into Lison's wide-open political and economic arenas.

Hammer's Star: While contact with the official inhabitants—Borealins and Concordans—is scant, both the Technospiders and the Picts have had contact with the smuggling and corsair bands that dwell inside star's asteroid belts. Trade between the two parties remains brisk, especially concerning information on the activity of the Galactic Concord and its Star Force.

AEGIS

The Regency government is courted by every political body in the Verge, both those native to it and those visiting from

afar. Prior to 2497, no serious competition existed to challenge Bluefall's eminence in the region. Although never officially recognized as anything more than another colony, Bluefall formed the nexus for Verge culture. When the Regency announced its position on an issue, many followed out of course, and others at least had to take it into account.

With the return of the stellar nations, Bluefall has both diminished and grown in importance. Many colonies can look to other sources for resources, aid, and supply. They can also look elsewhere for the opinions of an influential government. At the same time, however, Bluefall has become the center of operations for most Arriver politicians; when people want to deal with a stellar nation's chief representatives, they often come to Bluefall to do it. The Regency doesn't want to jeopardize that special status; just by controlling the ground of discussion and acting as host to diplomatic functions, they can favor one argument or one side of a debate. Plus, keeping the stellar nations relatively pleased means they're not likely to look elsewhere.

The Regency is one of several governments in the Verge to engage in its own colonization program in recent years. Hoping to prevent itself from being surrounded by hostile forces, the Regency has established small stations or colonies in as many as a dozen star systems near Aegis. The colonization program also helps to bleed off some of Bluefall's burgeoning population.

Tendrill: The Regency accepts Alaundril's leadership in Verge economic matters; the business leaders of Alaundril have a better understanding of the financial concerns of the region and the needs of its people for resources. For now, however, the future of the Verge is only partially determined by its assets, demands, and markets; it's also decided by political and military force of will. This is something that the Common Council sometimes fails to understand, and it is for this reason that many of the Verge systems look to the Regency, not Alaundril, for leadership.

Corrivale: While the citizens of Orion heritage on Bluefall have no special love for the Hatire, their government's neutral position, coupled with their own tenets of freedom of religious belief, have led the Regency to adopt a position that recognizes the Colonial Diocese as the legitimate authority on Grith and largely turns a blind eye toward the "indigenous" sesheyan culture. While the Regency has acted as a co-conspirator and neutral transshipment point in several efforts to relocate outlaw sesheyans, it generally prefers to forward them to Dewi or Corrivale rather than to its own peaceful shores.

Lucullus: This system is the focus of more Regency military planning than any other save Hammer's Star. Historically, the citizenry of Bluefall has little prejudice against Solars or even exiles or criminals looking to make a break with their past. On Penates, though, Hale sees nothing worth saving. Only the likely cost in lives of many innocents prevents Hale from undertaking a full-scale military intervention that would overthrow the Lucullan League. Instead, both Regency and League continually snipe at each other through other means.

Algemron: The Regency supports the Concord arms blockade of the system, and proclaims complete neutrality in the system's civil war. The only form of Regency shipping allowed to starfall for Algemron carries humanitarian aid such as medical supplies and food. The Regency space navy takes a dim view of Alitar-Galvin confrontations that take place outside of the system; its latest promise is to seize any aggressive Algemronian vessels that engage in military actions in their presence.

Oberon: Bluefall is no less beholden to the flow of rhodium than anyone else in the Verge; most of its dark matter reactors, both in vessels and in urban power facilities, receive their rhodium from Lison. Nevertheless, the Regency disagrees with the young democracy's support of anti-Arriver and anti-Concord political groups. Neither planet wants to be controlled by a stellar nation, but it cannot endorse the radical means by which the Lisons pursue their independence.

Hammer's Star: Relations with the Borealins are warm, and the Regency government has offered its most favorable trade status to the people of Spes. Hammer's Star is one of few systems to which the Regency allows military-grade arms and weaponry to flow easily. Yet at any moment, all of the Regency's own military might is poised to leap to the Hammer's Star system. Fully half of its naval assets are expected to be ready for a two-step jump to Hammer's Star within an hour. In addition, the Regency space navy trains rigorously in tactics designed to protect resupply vessels to the Concord fleet. While these preparations are welcomed by Admiral Raastad and his senior officers in Hammer's Star, other factions of the Concord governing body in the Verge are nettled by the Regency's implied assumption that the Concord is not sufficient to the task. But the people of Bluefall know that should the Hammer fall, they are the likely targets for the next invasion.

ALGEMRON

The civil war rules over foreign politics as it does over internal ones. Ironically, prior to the opening of the conflict, both planets of Algemron could expect a warm reception anywhere in the Verge. In the years following the Vanishing (2452) on Bluefall, many thought that it would be the twin planets of Algemron that would grow to replace the lost Orions as a would-be Verge capital. Sure, relations there were still tense, but the ceasefire had held for more than two generations' memory, since 2404.

The treacherous destruction by the Galvinites of the Alitarin capital city of Beronin in 2461 stilled any such hopes. If not for its own military power, money, and ability to disturb those around it, Algemron might be wholly ignored by its neighbors, another pariah in a lonely sector. But the violence here spills over, thanks in great part to the machinations of two stellar nations eager to resume their warring in a small theater.

Each of the two sides presses for favors from local Verge populations—who are more likely to pick sides, given the *Monitor* Mandate that forbids stellar nations to intervene. With the Galvinites, this usually takes a "you're with us or

you're against us" attitude; the Alitarins are only slightly less extreme, recognizing that many Verge states would like to have nothing to do with their problems.

Tendrill: With ships on both sides flying out of Alaundrin shipyards, good relations with this system may be the sole point of agreement for both Alitarins and Galvinites. The generals know that Alaundril sells to both sides, but with no other reasonable option for meeting orders, they have no choice but to countenance the profiteering. Neither is willing to anger Alaundril and risk being cut off.

Corrivale: Alitarins seeking solace often summer on Grith, under the sanctuary of the Hatire missionaries. It's a common tactic for operatives who've made themselves too recognizable or too dangerous to lie low on Grith. The only Galvinites who tend to come to this system are those who are hunting down Alitarin "terrorists."

Lucullus: The Federal State of Algernon draws on free-lance assets from Lucullus—mercenaries and criminals all—for much of its special operations outside of Algernon proper. Whenever Alitarin assets in the Verge show signs of vulnerability, corsairs or saboteurs of Lucullan origin make appearances. The sole exception is the group known as the Technospiders, who avoid getting involved simply by not accepting any such commissions.

Aegis: The Regency policy of neutrality angers the Federal State of Algernon tremendously. Galvinite agents have repeatedly offered evidence (the Regency claims it to be manufactured) that Regency shipments of humanitarian aid conceal financing and bankrolling operations aiding the Alitarins. The Imperial State of Algernon, on the hand, has never protested Regency neutrality and joins the Regency in denying any such aid.

Oberon: During the Verge's early days, some of the hawks of both of Algernon's states hoped to "recolonize" Lison, to take control of its priceless mines. The outbreak of war between the two took precedence, but to this day many individuals preserve the bizarre notion that Oberon should be theirs. Today both continue to trade with the ULS, but the two states of Algernon, like the stellar nations to which they are tied, have become concerned about Lison's radical political forums.

Hammer's Star: While Corrivale may be the likely retreat of Alitarins tired of the civil war or looking for a place to hide, in the last five years Spes has fulfilled the same role for disaffected Galvinites. Most of these are refugees whose departure from Galvin's security forces is considered treasonous, or at least a dereliction of duty. Many Galvinites take employment with Boman Corp, an Austrin terraforming company on Spes.

OBERON

Amidst the sea of very real complexities, personalities, and minutiae that are a part of foreign relations, two topics of conversation stand out when appointees from the ULS Department

of State meet with visiting dignitaries. Rhodium, to no one's surprise, is the first. The second is the support that the ULS is perceived as giving to special interest groups who oppose stellar nation control of Verge systems, worlds, and businesses.

Whenever a small Verge colony has trouble with a stellar nation and they can't seem to work out their differences by visiting Bluefall and working diplomatically, they plan a trip to Lison. There, they can meet men and women with experience in successful opposition of Arrivers. The course of action they adopt from these advisors varies depending on the circumstances.

Tendrill: Michael Kevik makes annual visits to Alaundril—not just to enjoy the better weather, but to renew the goodwill the two planets share. It's a true partnership that both sides acknowledge and do much to protect. Tendril helps to divert unfriendly attention, and Oberon offers the best rates available for rhodium, which suits the watchers of the Common Council's bottom line.

Corrivale: Most Lisons care little for the Theocracy's puppet state on Grith, but they share a common sympathy for the sesheyan refugees there. Should the sesheyans ever tire of jungle, or be forced from it, it's a surety that the ULS would offer asylum. To date, the ULS has blissfully ignored the criminal background of Aanghel Osu'ike, treating her with all the honor due to a visiting head of state.

Lucullus: It's bad enough that the Lisons must deal with pirates native to Oberon; to be forced into further "taxation" from a source so far away is intolerable. Lison traders do their best to keep to well-traveled spacelanes. It's all they can do against the pirates that they associate with Lucullus.

Aegis: While they hold many sentiments in common, the people of Lison and Bluefall just don't see eye to eye. People on Bluefall have it easy, life handed to them on a platter on a sunny beach. Life under Lison is tougher, dirtier, harder. While Lisons don't expect anyone else to understand that, the arrogant attitude of the comfortable Regency citizens especially annoys them. This is especially true since the return of stellar nations—and the Regent's blatant catering to every one of the outsiders' desires.

Algernon: The ULS makes a policy of complete avoidance of the Alitar-Galvin issue. It's something most Lisons would rather not face. Just as they claim that Vergers would be better off governing themselves, in Algernon Vergers prove to the galaxy that they're no better than the bellicose nation-states that gave birth to them. Oberon would love to see the system's troubles come to a peaceful resolution, but has no hope of even helping the process.

Hammer's Star: The Borealins have little need of rhodium, and most Lison shipping aims itself in the opposite direction. Lisons have little reason to visit Spes, and plenty of good reasons to avoid the place. Since most Star Force vessels refit in Tendril or even farther away, they don't require much in the way of refit or refuel from Oberon. Lisons do worry, like everyone else, about what would happen should clicks ever overrun Hammer's Star. Kevik has little force of his own to command; most people hope that if

TABLE 1: INTERSTELLAR DISTANCES

	Aeq	Alg	Algm	Arg	Cal	Chc	Chi	Cor	Cou	Dewi	Di	Eld	End	Gar	Goll	HmS	Ign	Kar	Luc	Man	McC	Mer	Obe	Osc 44
Aequis	0	31.29	38.69	22.23	51.1	34.32	25.18	47.27	37.6	24.17	43.05	39.58	42.92	33.37	52.77	43.64	36.02	40.7	20.21	38.86	11.01	35.43	22.8	12.44
Alpheta	31.29	0	76	31.43	40.43	47.8	37.07	77.61	52.17	25.88	45.32	40.69	69.13	41.82	47.46	47.79	54.69	39.03	38.14	34.48	21.88	38.3	33.26	40.79
Algenuron	38.69	76	0	38.3	39.77	54.29	43.38	84.82	58.47	30.91	49.93	44.18	76.14	45.67	48.88	53.02	59.54	40.48	44.01	37.04	29.09	43.86	39.13	48.21
Argus	22.23	31.43	38.3	0	64.5	17.09	30.45	60.83	23.85	28.15	39.87	37.48	52.99	53.2	62.16	31.68	56.29	57.96	34.54	38.56	18.23	23.34	35.38	21.85
Calesque	51.1	40.43	39.77	64.5	0	81.17	49.5	82.01	85.81	55.26	58.44	72.25	73.95	27.13	28.06	71.67	55.62	28.31	56.78	65.06	49.33	64.49	38.42	63.34
Chester	34.32	47.8	54.29	17.09	81.17	0	43	61.76	10.37	38.94	50.61	41.63	56.32	67.4	77.71	37.47	64.75	72.35	42.82	46.08	33.19	32.63	49.77	27.39
Chinju	25.18	37.07	43.38	30.45	49.5	43	0	51	50.93	45.36	19.52	61.38	35.55	37.83	37.08	27.71	55.87	53.06	45.12	59.63	28.59	22.68	12.46	32.81
Corrivalle	47.27	77.61	84.82	60.83	82.01	61.76	51	0	63.46	68.12	65.93	78.49	22.17	56.25	76.11	67.73	51.16	72.4	54.48	80.85	58.19	65.65	51.65	43.28
Coulomb	37.6	52.17	58.47	23.85	85.81	10.37	50.93	63.46	0	38.22	60.32	36.85	61.53	70.87	85.12	47.81	63.29	73.7	41.1	43.01	36.56	42.6	56.2	28.63
Dewi	24.17	25.88	30.91	28.15	55.26	38.94	45.36	68.12	38.22	0	59.61	18.29	66.8	44.99	65.87	57.44	39.78	38.91	17.38	14.92	16.81	47.89	41.75	27.27
Diana	43.05	45.32	49.93	39.87	58.44	50.61	19.52	65.93	60.32	59.61	0	74.44	46.66	53.95	38.48	18.71	75.15	68.52	62.86	72.45	43.52	19.54	29.13	49.52
Eldala	39.58	40.69	44.18	37.48	72.25	41.63	61.38	78.49	36.85	18.29	74.44	0	79.84	62.3	83.91	88.7	49.88	53.48	28.13	9.2	33.29	59.73	59.33	37.67
Endomar	42.92	69.13	76.14	52.99	73.95	56.32	35.55	78.49	61.53	66.8	46.66	79.84	0	52.33	61.23	50.45	59.38	71.64	57.53	80.99	52.74	50.19	39.51	42.28
Garad	33.37	41.82	45.67	53.2	27.13	67.4	37.83	56.25	70.87	44.99	53.95	62.3	52.33	0	37.09	64.73	53.05	22.51	38.71	57.73	37.13	57.57	25.6	43.9
Golfstone	52.77	47.46	48.88	62.16	29.06	77.71	37.08	76.11	85.12	65.87	38.48	83.91	61.23	37.09	0	55.93	69.33	51.33	67.08	78.5	53.14	52.15	31.04	64.29
Hammer's 43.64	47.79	53.02	31.68	31.68	71.67	37.47	27.71	67.73	47.81	57.44	18.71	68.7	50.45	64.73	55.93	0	79.1	76.59	62.31	68.59	42.98	9.85	39.37	46.05
Ignatius	36.02	54.69	59.54	56.29	55.62	64.75	55.87	51.16	63.29	39.78	75.15	49.88	59.38	33.05	69.33	79.1	0	31.55	24.51	48.54	41.28	71.18	47.39	38.4
Karnath	40.7	39.03	40.48	57.96	28.31	72.35	53.06	72.4	73.7	38.91	68.52	53.48	71.64	22.51	51.33	76.59	31.55	0	36.19	47.01	39.76	67.78	41.55	50.36
Lucullus	20.21	38.14	44.01	34.54	56.78	42.82	45.12	54.48	41.1	17.38	62.86	28.13	57.53	37.71	67.08	62.31	24.51	36.19	0	28.01	21.62	53.61	40.17	20.74
Manibron 38.86	34.48	37.04	38.56	38.56	65.06	46.08	59.63	80.85	43.01	14.92	72.45	9.2	80.99	57.73	78.5	68.59	48.54	47.01	28.01	0	31.2	59.14	56.3	39.87
McComb's 11.01	21.68	29.09	18.23	49.33	33.19	28.59	28.59	58.19	36.56	16.81	43.52	33.29	52.74	37.13	53.14	42.98	41.28	39.76	21.62	31.2	0	33.59	26.37	19.14
Menden	35.43	38.3	43.86	23.34	64.49	32.63	22.68	65.65	42.6	47.89	19.54	59.73	50.19	57.57	52.15	9.85	71.18	67.78	53.61	59.14	33.59	0	33.02	38.91
Oberon	22.8	33.26	39.13	35.38	38.42	49.77	12.46	51.65	56.2	41.75	29.13	59.33	39.51	25.6	31.04	39.37	47.39	41.55	40.17	56.3	26.37	33.02	0	33.51
Oscar 44	12.44	40.79	48.21	21.85	63.34	27.39	32.81	43.28	28.63	27.27	49.52	37.67	42.28	43.9	64.29	46.05	38.4	50.36	20.74	39.87	19.14	38.91	33.51	0
Patriot	43.11	67.51	73.14	63.88	65.16	70.19	58.93	38.93	69.12	53.72	78.25	63.71	51.64	39.2	73.84	82.72	17.73	45.54	36.96	63.79	51.48	76.29	51.77	43.33
Polytroika	33.12	53.81	60.92	30.59	72.91	32.47	24.23	42.81	40.47	53.49	31.23	64.74	28.12	56.61	60.28	25.75	64.07	71.18	51.01	66.43	38.75	25.64	34.64	31.27
Polyomy	42.45	71.45	78.45	51.93	87.76	48.37	80.7	35.98	44.03	51.49	77.67	53.96	50.02	63.13	90.65	73.39	41.88	68.81	37.66	59.23	50.15	68.38	60.62	32.33
Ressant	43.65	57.33	63.18	45.91	65.05	53.41	21.14	50.64	62.23	65.44	19.6	80.28	29.35	53.33	44.59	28.61	71.73	71.93	63.49	79.59	48.7	30.9	30.63	47.75
Retrast	31	59.7	66.31	49.83	65.9	54.5	47.81	29.66	53.76	45.01	66.96	54.95	40.68	39.68	70.38	68.85	22.61	48.34	28.54	56.36	40.56	62.79	43.44	28.42
Rinotoko	25.9	52.43	59.88	31.22	68.5	34.41	24.5	32.63	40.1	48.21	38.14	60.02	22.31	48.65	59.57	36.18	52.69	63.28	42.18	61.75	34.33	33.41	30.95	23.21
Spiderhole 47.79	61.61	67.82	40.4	67.82	40.4	80.79	41.39	56.67	50.83	66.35	27.25	77.32	38.45	68.64	63.08	18.88	80.4	83.87	66.62	78.59	51.2	25.32	44.17	47.36
Talbot	22.53	32.26	37.12	42.19	32.53	56.32	34.3	55.41	59.04	31.6	51.72	48.96	52.37	13.44	43.26	59.02	27.92	20.24	26.33	44.66	24.94	50.75	23.42	33.25
Tarsis	17.18	28.65	35.12	20.76	79.98	30.91	39.31	60.36	30.84	9.68	54.14	22.6	58.61	44.56	64.65	50.8	39.6	43.25	15.71	22.62	11.88	41.69	37.51	18.1
Tandell	49.99	75.53	81.29	70.32	71.96	75.55	64.29	36.96	74.36	61.73	83.29	71.15	52.27	45.75	79.23	87.8	26	53.41	44.75	71.73	58.95	81.99	57.76	49.28
Tartine	20.92	51.4	58.84	31.52	69.64	33.12	37.49	33.35	33.39	37.25	54.53	46.04	36.3	47.12	69.32	51.42	38.16	55.92	26.6	49.12	29.81	45.78	38.48	11.26
Thalassa	31.98	61.31	68.18	50.22	84.42	55.54	40.32	19.35	57.29	52.14	58.41	64.5	26.73	38.06	63	62.19	33.81	53.08	38.11	65.37	42.86	57.64	37.33	31.26
Three	22.9	52.21	59.16	38.54	66.59	42.12	43.51	35.45	40.79	35.2	62.06	43.9	42.59	42.78	70.67	61.02	27.09	49.02	20.19	46.34	31.46	54.43	41.08	16.77
Thunther	32.53	39.4	42.85	50.08	43.25	61.91	52.02	64.29	61.41	28.18	69.54	40.67	66.88	28.74	61.36	73.9	19.4	17.04	21.19	36.12	32.59	64.84	42.51	38.97
Tychus	51.02	43.34	44.33	60.21	25.03	76.23	37.12	77.48	83.39	62.49	39.33	80.41	63.31	35.48	5.24	55.96	67.47	47.83	64.54	74.67	50.51	51.42	30.34	62.88
Vieron	34.79	26.68	30.15	37.96	36.47	53.96	20.65	69.67	61.66	46	23.75	62.91	55.09	37.48	25.72	35.63	61.95	47.78	51.05	58.44	32.18	29.26	18.89	45.62
Yanduh	43.02	66.69	74	39.21	87.27	33.87	39.68	40.69	39.6	61.66	46.08	69.68	31.16	68.58	75.57	37.37	70.05	82.49	57.36	73.24	49.35	38.63	49.07	36.75

TABLE 1: INTERSTELLAR DISTANCES (CONTINUED)

Star	Par. 44	Poly	Prox	Res	Ret	Rin	Spid	Tal	Tar	Ten	Ter	ThF	Th	Tyc	Vie	Yan	STAR	X	Y	Z
Aegis	43.11	33.12	42.45	43.65	31	25.9	47.79	22.53	17.18	49.99	20.92	31.98	32.53	51.02	34.79	43.02	Aegis	0	0	0
Alpheta	67.51	53.81	71.45	57.33	59.7	52.43	61.61	32.26	28.65	75.53	51.4	61.31	52.21	39.4	43.34	26.68	Alpheta	-12.8	-14.52	-24.59
Algenron	73.14	60.92	78.45	63.18	66.31	59.88	67.82	37.12	35.12	81.29	56.84	68.18	42.85	44.33	30.15	74	Algenron	-14.71	-16.86	-31.56
Argos	63.88	30.59	51.93	45.91	49.83	31.22	40.4	42.19	20.76	70.32	31.52	50.22	39.54	50.08	60.21	37.96	Argos	-19.52	-9.02	5.62
Calesque	65.16	72.91	87.76	65.05	65.9	68.5	80.79	32.53	57.98	71.96	69.64	64.42	66.59	43.25	25.03	36.47	Calesque	23.85	-18.74	-41.12
Chester	70.19	32.47	48.37	53.41	54.5	34.41	41.39	56.32	30.91	75.55	33.12	55.54	42.12	61.91	76.23	53.96	Chester	-28.14	-3.55	19.33
Chinju	58.93	24.23	60.7	21.14	47.81	24.5	31.89	34.3	39.31	64.29	37.49	40.32	43.51	52.02	37.12	20.65	Chinju	724	-23.54	5.26
Corrivalle	38.93	42.81	35.98	50.64	29.66	32.63	56.67	55.41	60.36	36.96	33.35	19.35	35.45	64.29	77.48	69.67	Corrivalle	29.74	11.26	34.98
Coulomb	69.12	40.47	44.03	62.23	53.76	40.1	50.83	59.04	30.84	74.36	33.39	57.29	40.79	61.41	83.39	61.66	Coulomb	-31.58	6.23	19.44
Dewi	53.72	53.49	51.49	65.44	45.01	48.21	66.35	31.6	9.68	61.73	37.25	52.14	35.2	28.18	62.49	46	Dewi	-16.11	9.43	-15.36
Diana	78.25	31.23	77.67	19.6	66.96	38.14	27.25	51.72	54.14	83.29	54.53	58.41	62.06	69.54	39.33	23.75	Diana	2.38	-42.26	7.88
Eldala	63.71	64.74	53.96	80.28	54.95	60.02	77.32	48.96	22.6	71.15	46.04	64.5	43.9	40.67	80.41	62.91	Eldala	-30.5	20.68	-14.44
Endomar	51.64	28.12	50.02	29.35	40.68	22.31	38.45	52.37	58.61	45.75	47.12	38.06	42.78	28.74	35.48	37.48	Endomar	26.22	-10.47	32.33
Garad	39.2	56.61	63.13	53.33	39.68	48.66	68.64	13.44	64.65	79.23	69.32	63	70.67	61.36	5.24	25.72	Garad	27	-2.77	-19.42
Gollstone	73.84	60.28	90.65	44.59	70.38	59.57	63.08	43.26	64.65	45.75	47.12	38.06	42.78	28.74	35.48	37.48	Gollstone	27.23	-39.81	-21.4
Hammer's Star	82.72	25.75	73.39	28.61	68.85	36.18	18.88	59.02	50.8	87.8	51.42	62.19	61.02	73.9	55.96	35.63	Hammer's Star	-13.3	-37.88	17.1
Ignatius	17.73	64.07	41.88	71.73	22.61	52.69	80.4	27.92	39.6	26	38.16	33.81	27.09	19.4	67.47	61.95	Ignatius	18.72	28.35	-11.97
Karnath	45.54	71.18	68.81	71.93	48.34	63.28	83.87	20.24	43.25	53.41	55.92	53.08	49.02	17.04	47.83	47.78	Karnath	16.74	8.21	-36.18
Lucullus	36.96	51.01	37.86	63.49	28.54	42.18	66.62	26.33	15.71	44.75	26.6	38.11	20.19	21.19	64.54	51.05	Lucullus	-3.27	18.36	-7.78
Mantebrom	61.79	66.43	59.23	79.59	56.36	61.75	78.59	24.94	11.88	58.95	29.81	42.86	31.46	32.59	50.51	32.18	Mantebrom	-27.3	16.66	-22.07
McComb's Star	53.48	38.75	50.15	48.7	40.56	34.33	51.2	24.94	11.88	58.95	29.81	42.86	31.46	32.59	50.51	32.18	McComb's Star	-8.01	-2.72	-7.04
Meriden	76.29	25.64	68.38	30.9	62.79	33.41	25.32	50.75	41.89	81.99	45.78	57.64	54.43	64.84	51.42	29.26	Meriden	-13.6	-31.19	9.88
Oberon	51.77	34.84	60.62	30.63	43.44	30.95	44.17	23.42	37.51	57.76	38.48	37.33	41.08	42.51	30.34	18.89	Oberon	13.24	-18.08	-4.2
Oscar 44	43.33	31.27	32.33	47.75	28.42	23.21	47.36	33.25	18.1	49.28	11.26	31.26	16.77	38.97	62.88	45.62	Oscar 44	-4.81	6.71	9.31
Patriot	0	63.47	37.77	70.34	16.65	51.07	79.38	38.08	50.95	8.52	38.48	25.26	28.44	36.31	73.2	69.18	Patriot	30.51	30.44	1.11
Polytrouka	63.47	0	51.52	23.68	48.49	12.56	17.27	51.18	44.54	67.1	31.39	40.52	42.18	65.09	60.94	43.46	Polytrouka	-0.4	-18.24	27.64
Resont	70.34	23.68	69.62	0	59.62	25.36	41.23	68.06	55.34	44.78	39.15	23.54	33.63	21.31	54.04	89.95	Resont	2.54	33.18	26.35
Retrast	16.65	48.49	25.36	59	0	36.05	22.36	53.01	58.29	73.68	48.62	47.38	56.62	71.29	46.9	36.37	Retrast	14.88	-35.14	21.19
Rinostoke	51.07	12.56	41.23	28.93	36.05	0	29.52	43.21	39.2	54.59	20.81	28.28	30.79	56.02	60.01	44.46	Rinostoke	18.72	22.64	9.91
Spiderhole	79.98	17.27	68.06	22.36	65.49	29.52	0	64.36	58.04	83.43	48.53	56.39	59.37	79.73	64.34	47.28	Spiderhole	5.68	-7.86	24.02
Talbot	38.08	51.18	55.34	53.01	34.87	43.21	64.36	0	31.37	45.84	38.5	36.47	34.17	19.85	40.81	34.9	Talbot	-4.01	-34.22	33.12
Tarsis	50.95	44.54	44.78	58.29	39.77	39.2	58.04	31.37	0	58.44	28.59	45.66	28.69	31.96	61.88	43.88	Tarsis	14.36	1.29	-17.31
Tendril	8.52	67.1	39.15	73.68	21.07	54.59	83.43	45.84	58.44	0	42.91	27.24	33.77	44.77	79.02	75.74	Tendril	-14.31	7.31	-6.09
Terrvine	38.48	31.39	23.54	48.62	22.03	20.81	48.53	38.5	28.59	42.91	0	24.13	11.87	43.98	68.58	53.21	Terrvine	36.24	33.82	6.44
Thalassa	25.26	40.52	33.63	47.38	14.98	28.28	56.39	36.47	45.66	27.24	24.13	0	22.34	45.38	63.44	56.04	Thalassa	1.35	11.41	17.48
Three Pines	28.44	42.18	21.31	56.62	13.25	30.79	59.37	34.17	28.69	33.77	11.87	22.34	0	35.65	69.56	56.68	Three Pines	25.43	10.77	16.12
Thonther	36.31	65.09	54.04	71.29	36.87	56.02	79.73	19.85	31.96	44.77	43.98	45.38	35.65	0	58.25	51.96	Thonther	5.81	19.66	10.21
Tychus	73.2	60.94	89.95	46.9	69.79	60.01	64.34	40.81	61.88	79.02	68.58	63.44	69.56	58.25	0	23.5	Tychus	8.63	18.53	-25.31
Vieron	69.18	43.46	76.22	36.37	61.03	44.46	47.28	34.9	43.88	75.74	53.21	56.04	56.68	51.96	23.5	0	Vieron	23.82	-37.7	-24.78
Yandub	67.21	15.77	47.25	36.36	51.31	19.96	24.47	62.63	52.06	69.52	33.26	44.3	44.85	74.03	76.36	59.04	Yandub	4.12	-31.84	-13.39
																			-11.19	41.38



NECTARIS

ORBITAL & STATION



15

STATE OF THE VERGE

NECTARIS

DEPARTURES

5. KARNATH	15
8. TALBOTT	0
13. DEWI	2
4. TYCHUS	
9. CANCELLE	
1. VIERNON	
10. LUCUL	
15. ELOAL	

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they batten down the hatches and hide under Lison, they would be ignored. Hopefully, they'll never have to find out.

HAMMER'S STAR

With only a small colony—compared to the giants of Aegis or Tendril—of semi-independent Borealins on its surface, there's little cause for the state to forge ties with other Verge governments. In reality, the Galactic Concord makes all the important decisions anyway, and the Verge governments have their own channels to deal with them—even though dealing with Concord ambassadors is unlikely to change any of Admiral Raastad's decisions.

Indeed, most Verge states go about their daily lives happily pretending that the looming danger facing Hammer's Star doesn't exist. It's a necessary survival mechanism for them. Meanwhile, for both the Borealins and the Concordans fighting here, all the concerns and disputes about tariff rights and sovereignty don't matter a whit; they're fighting to live, to protect one another's lives. In the face of that, nothing else much matters.

Tendril: About the only thing that concerns people of Hammer's Star is Tendril's Burn. They depend on those few resupply ships to keep them going, and in the event of emergency, reinforcements. The possible delays in either that could occur during the twelve- to fourteen-day Burn represent a serious military obstacle with no real answer—unless a substitute avenue into and out of the Verge becomes popular.

Corrivale: The Borealins, recent arrivals like the Hatire, have almost no understanding of what might motivate the Brethren to desire a reduced force commitment in the Verge. Yet the Hatire desire exactly that. They do not realize that they could as easily become the eventual prey of an attack like that which destroyed Silver Bell. The Borealins wonder just how much the Brethren's tune would change if they were the ones living next to an implacable enemy. The current Hatire intervention in the Committee for Verge Integration, moving for a reduced force commitment, smacks of insanity.

Lucullus: At present, most Borealins and Concordans view the criminals of Lucullus with contempt. But there are bigger issues at hand, and even those criminals share something with the people of Spes: humanity. In other words, they're not clicks, bent on human slaughter. Should the Borealins ever become aware of the Lucullan connection to pirates that hinder the war effort, that same black-or-white mentality would inspire nothing less than a desire to leave Penates the lifeless rock it once was.

Aegis: At least for now, Spes is one of few planets that doesn't automatically encourage its people in occasional visits to Bluefall. Still, Aegis does offer a salve for Borealins and Concordans looking for a place without murderous six-legged arachnids. Plus, the Regency has done everything to reassure the people of Spes that it won't abandon them. A single call will put the Regency fleet into motion. Unfortunately, the Borealins had better know that they need

help a full two weeks before they make the call, or be able to hold out for that long.

Algremron: A waste of useful military resources, thinks the average inhabitant of Spes. Furthermore, there's the clandestine efforts of stellar nations to smuggle arms into that civil war—arms that they could bring openly to the Hammer's Star system. In a perverse sort of way, many Borealins have expressed the quiet hope that if they're ever slain by clicks, the bugs pay their next visit to Algremron and settle that pointless little civil war forever.

Oberon: The Branch College of Justice Ethics has made study of the Lison technodemocracy one of its objectives for the next decade. The technodemocracy has already outlasted any previous example of a sizeable direct democracy with universal suffrage in modern times, and this most liberal of the Borealin Colleges wants to see what it can learn from the Lisons. For their part, most Lisons find themselves flattered at the attention given to their government, positive for once.

GETTING AROUND

Getting from place to place can pose a significant challenge. For heroes, travel can become an annoyance instead of a challenge of the story. Even if they have ready access to a starship, it's just as likely that the vessel has a stardrive capable of only 5 or at best 10 light-year starfalls. Trying to cross the Verge can be a process of months at such a rate—not very satisfactory for those in a hurry.

For Arrivers, in some sense, the situation is even more aggravating. In the Stellar Ring, transportation is far easier to come by. When you're surrounded by hundreds of worlds each with population in the billions, it's easy to support a developed transportation industry. In the typical system of the Ring, each day will see a dozen or so departures of commercial passenger ships and another dozen bulk cargo craft.

To some extent, there's nothing to be done about it. Vergers might wish for such regular and dependable service at their starports, but the economic realities of the less-populated frontier make that unrealistic. For much of their travels, Vergers have no choice but to become accustomed to frequent, shorter starfalls. The days and weeks go by. For heroes, this is never more true than when journeying to unexplored systems or fledgling colonies.

For those who frequently cross between the most-settled worlds today, alternatives grow more common every day.

HITCHING A RIDE

Even though they may not have command of them, heroes will see occasionally the gigantic warships and commercial liners that are capable of great starleaps. Most of them accept passengers, regardless of their origin or destination. A little extra profit never hurts even the rhodium haulers. By now, most Vergers have also become familiar with the practice of stardrive piggybacking, by which a smaller

starship can link or dock with a larger one and be carried along much like any other piece of cargo, traveling at the range of the larger ship's stardrive.

The only question for heroes in the Verge—and Gamemasters of STAR'DRIVE campaigns—relates to the availability of interstellar transportation. Certain ships are known to traverse the region. The *Lighthouse*, as an example, has a set schedule that directs it across the Verge. Its 50 light-year stardrive is the most impressive around, but not the only one for Vergers to grasp. The *Tender Dawn* and the *Revealer*, two Concord dreadnoughts that patrol the frontier, keep their own schedules, published only a month or so in advance, subject to change as the Concord rushes to answer emergencies or just rattle its saber. With 35 light-year stardrives, they can accelerate a heroic journey to a fortuitous encounter. Then there's around a dozen or so cruiser and destroyer-sized vessels, each capable of 20 to 25 light-year starfalls. They're the patrollers-in-force. That makes for a total of fifteen likely candidates for heroes with military connections or even a bankroll to finance the lift.

In addition to these are the civilian liners. Most of these are bulk cargo carriers, although a few passenger liners find use delivering people to and from Aegis, and even moving Concordans as far as Hammer's Star. Only two years ago, there were only around twenty commercial liners in the Verge, none of which had a stardrive capable of more than 20 light-year starfalls. By the summer of 2502, that number had more than tripled, and that stardrive limit was broken.

McLACHLAN SPACELINES

Sensing the opportunity, perhaps, to meet the demands of a customer base that would only grow with time, this Orion transportation conglomerate made a big move into the Verge beginning in early 2501. Since then, some forty-seven McLachlan commercial liners have registered with the Galactic Concord for Verge licenses. The principal function of all of these craft is cargo-carrying. Manufactured goods come into Tendril and are dispersed throughout the Verge. Unrefined raw resources make their way back out.

Among these ships is the titanic, near-spherical *Ringbearer*, one of the largest ships in the McLachlan fleet or anywhere else. Seven hundred meters long and almost as wide, it boasts a cubic volume greater than that of the Concord's mobile station. Capable of 40 light-year starfalls, this giant spends most of its time completing circuits between Aegis, Algremron, Oberon, and Tendril.

The typical McLachlan vessel is much smaller than the *Ringbearer*; however. Only 200 meters long, the average *Hebrides*-class liner runs 25 light-year starfalls. The *Hebrides* frame is ideal for piggybacking too, with numerous docking ports and conduits for providing power and support. The center of a *Hebrides* cruiser is home to a small communal area where its passengers can socialize and purchase whatever they need from McLachlan provisioners. In a captive market, though, prices are typically some 20% over interstellar average.

While falling under civilian control and authorities, the Concord includes provisions in all of its Verge licenses authorizing it to commandeer the McLachlan ships for wartime use.

AVAILABILITY

Gamemasters can use the schedule presented in *The Lighthouse* as a template around which to build their own schedules for any or all of these craft, which heroes can then use to plan their own trips in the Verge. With a total of more than fifty vessels to consider, that might present a formidable challenge. Simpler still, the Gamemaster can determine the availability of ships on a case-by-case basis.

For the sake of a story, the Gamemaster can conveniently describe the arrival of a starship—be it a Concord military cruiser or a civilian—whenever it's needed. Such good fortune shouldn't come along every time the heroes need it, and the Gamemaster should decide where large vessels are most likely to appear. Moreover, the heroes may have to make do with the ship traveling somewhere close to where they're going, not their actual destination.

To determine the probability of a vessel traveling in the direction the heroes want to travel in a given week, make a special *availability check*. Like a standard skill check, roll a d20 against a target number. An Ordinary result indicates some correlation of destinations, getting the heroes closer; Good indicates travel to the same system, and an Amazing indicates the exact location within a system. For each week the heroes wait, apply a -1 step bonus to the check. The Gamemaster can apply other modifiers based on the popularity of the destination.

To determine the *availability score* of a given system, first refer to its defense rating (listed on page 89 of the STAR'DRIVE campaign setting or in the system's description). Availability score = (defense rating × 5) + 5.

RATES

Long practice, reinforced by McLachlan Spacelines, determines rates depending on the distance traveled. The average price (prices vary as much 30% from carrier to carrier) for a passenger is about \$200, plus an additional \$10 per light-year. First-class accommodations, if available, usually cost triple this rate, and space aboard a military ship, if purchased and not requisitioned somehow, adds an average of 20%.

The growing standard for ferrying a ship is determined by the size of the ship and the distance. Assume the typical merchant charges based on the following formula:

$$\text{Total cost} = \text{Dur} \times \text{ly} \times \$25$$

Dur is the total durability of the ship being carried, and *ly* the total distance in light-years that the ship is ferried. Apply the same modifiers for passenger service, noted above. Also note that this service does not include refueling, resupply, or anything other than actual hook-up and delivery.

When hearing the words "relic" or "artifact" in connection with a place in the Verge, the average person is likely to think of the bizarre objects found in the Skyward Caverns of Tendril or in the Glassmaker ruins of Mantebtron. Yet for visitors to the Dewi star system, the term "relic" has a new meaning. Historically, it could be applied to the dying star Dewi. Today, it's also rightfully given to the system's primary inhabitants, members of a lost but not forgotten culture: the Dreth Commonwealth.

The star system consists of a relatively simple grouping of nine planets orbiting a single orange K0 star, Dewi. Although Dewi sheds less light, heat, and energy than does Sol, it's strong enough to bake its inner planets, Belatu and Cadros, with intolerable heat and drive off whatever atmosphere they might have had, rendering them into arid rocks. Amaethon, the third planet, and Caridwen, the fourth, form a pair of gas giants that managed to evolve in the star's ring of habitability. Meanwhile, the Jovian worlds of Gwydion, Dylan, and Bran and the rocky iceworlds of Arianrhod and Pwyll round out the dark and cold expanse of space, as far as 26 AU from the source of the system's heat and light.

With only such planets to fill it, the Dewi star system might have gone ignored for a long time, mentioned only in some stellar catalogs. But around both Amaethon and Caridwen are numerous moons that prove more interesting. And though none of them are ideal for human habitation, a full seven are close enough to human standards to attract attention, exploration, and colonization.

HISTORY

The history of the Dewi system differs from that of other systems in the Verge. Most settlements in the Verge have ties to the stellar nations of Old Space; many are former colonies or protectorates. Dewi is unique among Verge systems; it actually contains the seat of an exiled government of the Stellar Ring—the Dreth Commonwealth (see the description of the Dreth Commonwealth that follows). The Galactic Concord has recognized the government of Dewi as the sole representative of the Dreth

Commonwealth, thereby adding a strong element of legitimacy to a people struggling to survive.

EXPLORATION

After the First Galactic War, the Dreth Commonwealth, much like the Anarchist Union and the Free Kyrena Society, turned its focus inward. While many of the other stellar nations seized the peace dividend to expand their frontier territories, the Commonwealth paid attention to its domestic issues and internal differences. It wasn't until 2335—a full twenty-three years after GW1 ended, and only eleven years before GW2 was to begin, that leaders in the Commonwealth began to demonstrate an interest in expansion, including the cultivation of a site somewhere in the Verge. Ironically, this was about the same time that most stellar nations began to curtail their colonization expenditures as tensions in the Stellar Ring increased.

Not every citizen of the Commonwealth, however, had the same interest in strictly internal matters. A large group of self-funded Dreth, led by a youthful but magnetic Joshua Kanar, made their way to the Verge in 2327. Kanar promised the possibility of a new beginning, which drew the interest of many of the independent-minded Dreth. In all, some nine thousand Dreth left from a cluster of seven systems in Dreth space. Basing themselves from the Orion League colony already well under construction in the Aegis system, they wandered along an axis perpendicular to the typical expanding growth toward Hammer's Star and the Perseus Arm of the galaxy—past Arisnar toward Coulomb. Eventually, a fleet of two dozen vessels arrived at the Dewi star system.

COLONIZATION

After emptying his ship of materials and supplies, Kanar sailed back toward the Stellar Ring happy about his discovery and eager to spread news of his success. Meanwhile, his wife, Kathryn Barker, stayed behind to supervise the construction of the first Dreth settlements on Ferrand, the fourth moon of Amaethon. The relatively low gravity conditions on the moon made easier the con-

CHAPTER

DEWI

2

struction of the first settlement, which grew quickly to provide shelter for the 9,100 Dreth colonists.

The Dreth weathered the challenges of living so far apart from the rest of the civilized galaxy and the problems of building a future in an unfamiliar territory. Ironically, the independent nature of the Dreth made difficult the progress of the colony as a single political body. Only two years after the Founding, the Dreth began to argue about the nature of the settlement's future. Should it follow all the conventions and customs of Dreth culture back home? Or should it unite in a more centralized form of government, to better defend against the dangers of the Verge? Who should lead, without the existence of the Commonwealth bureaucracy?

Over the course of the summer of 2333, the colonists fell into a kind of quiet civil war as factions preferring unity argued with those preferring disparity. While bloodshed claimed only a few lives, the Dreth colony fell into collapse as opinions on both sides became more entrenched. After the disappearance and presumed death of Kathryn Barker, the disintegration accelerated. The attempt to preserve the colony as an independent whole collapsed, and the colonists fell back on their traditions of separatism. As they reasserted themselves, these divisions led the colony to break up into smaller groups. By the end of the decade, seven colonies stood where only one had been before. The representatives from each of the seven original Dreth worlds seized one of the seven most habitable moons in the habitable ring of the system, creating a division much like the social one that existed back in Commonwealth space. In the objective view of history, it was a foolish decision. The population in no way merited the hasty division, and even given a political desire for separation, it would have been more reasonable to establish independent settlements on the surface of old Ferrand or, better yet, Lousanne.

Yet despite this, once they had separated, their relations improved. They kept friendly contact with one another, and the seven new colonies managed to flourish and grow. In only twenty years, the population in the Dewi system more than tripled thanks to steady immigration and an aggressive reward policy that the colonies instituted to encourage the birth of children.

RENEWAL

Years passed before the return of the colony's former leader, Joshua Kanar. Caught up in the terrible events of the Second Galactic War, it was fully fifty years before he was able to return to his beloved colony. His service during the war forged him into a talented leader, skilled in guerrilla tactics both on land and in space. With his wife and friends he left behind on Ferrand he had little contact, and none after the loss of the Kendai relay in 2375. When he embarked on the long journey home, he had little idea what he might find.

Kanar returned to discover the people he had brought together fighting amongst themselves and both his dreams

and his wife victims of the casualties. And with him he brought representatives of the Commonwealth government who were determined to plant the flag of a new Dreth state and restore the ideological leadership of Adalcus to the Dewi system's colonies.

The conflict between Kanar's goals of a unified new Dreth Commonwealth, able to wage a war of revenge against VoidCorp, and those of the representatives he brought to Dewi was soon obvious. Kanar wanted a stronger federal government and closer ties between each of the seven moons, while each of the Dreth delegates encouraged the decentralization of power and disjointed state of affairs. For Kanar's dream, exhausted by decades of fruitless war, this was the final blow.

THE LONG SILENCE

Over the course of the century that became known as the Long Silence, the inhabitants of the Dewi system experienced a different trauma than did other Verge systems. Like all of the Verge's inhabitants, the people of the Dewi system slowly lost touch with their patron after the war opened. And the loss of the Kendai relay station in 2375 meant the cessation of almost all contact with the Stellar Ring.

With the destruction of the Dreth Commonwealth fleet in 2380 and the eventual conquest of all Dreth space, it appeared that the Dreth way of life might die out forever. So the people of the Dewi system believed when the rumors of the destruction of Adalcus began to drift in. Yet in the year 2388, a fleet of Dreth vessels, led by eight military cruisers and bearing both Joshua Kanar and members of the old Commonwealth government, arrived in the Dewi star system. It was one of several Dreth military groups to flee from the disasters in the Stellar Ring, but the only one known to make it out to the Verge.

A ruling council of twenty-one, with three representatives from each colony, which included many members of the old Commonwealth, formed a new government. It evolved into a weak confederacy and consensus government, rather than the more structured government Kanar favored. It is ironic that the Commonwealth leaders Kanar brought out to Dewi became the very source of opposition to his vision of a more unified political structure. Given the sudden doubling of the system's population to numbers approaching 200,000 people, Kanar had hoped that the Dreth Commonwealth would attempt to build a new destiny here in the Verge, perhaps even forging a new stellar nation out in the frontier. Certainly it possessed one of the strongest fleets in the region, and even if the pre-Vanishing society of Bluefall was stronger, the new Dreth state could avoid the Orions and move away into the frontier. But the government portrayed Kanar's goal of a stronger Dreth society only as an excuse to put himself and his followers in positions of power. Within a year of his return, Kanar's reformation efforts earned him the title of traitor to the

state, and he fled the Dewi system into exile. His imagined and often-discussed new Commonwealth was not to be.

After their arrival, Dreth leaders spent most of their efforts restoring old-fashioned Dreth cultural values. One of these was strong independence for every Dreth colony and settlement. The fleet was broken up and assigned proportionally to each colony, but this was less beneficial to the colonies than it might have been. The meager fleet that had arrived with the old Commonwealth leaders was scarred, battered, and in need of serious repair. No shipyard in the Dewi system had the capability to see to such ships, nor did they have the heavy industry to replace them. And the owners of the shipyards in the Verge had no real interest in restoring a strong fleet to the Dreth. As a result, in only a decade after coming to the seven colonies, the Dreth fleet had shrunk to half its size. In order to keep as many starships as possible in working order, engineers scavenged the more damaged craft for parts, systems, and even whole sections. Several of the old wrecks can still be found in orbit of Amaethon.

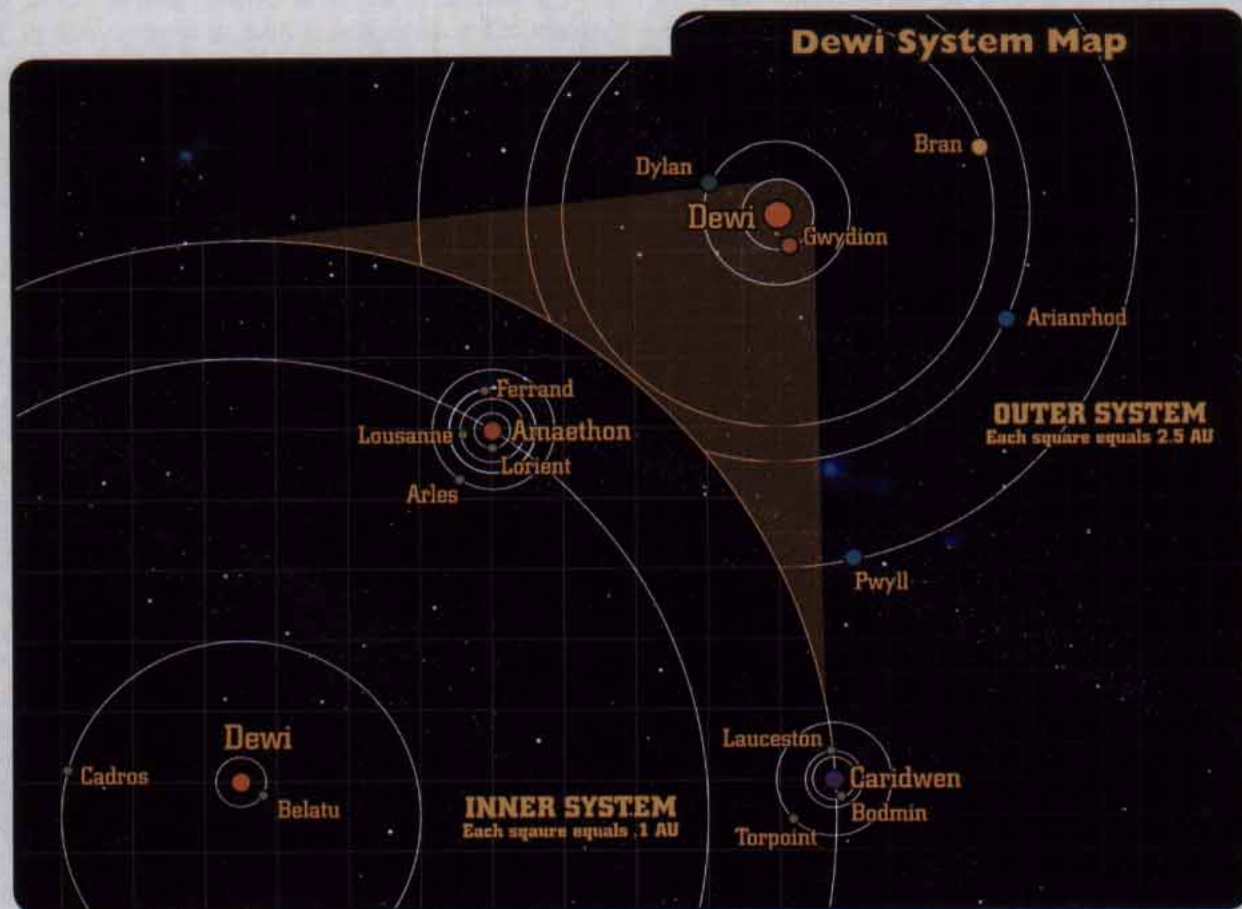
TODAY

Some say those same mothballed ships symbolize the current state of affairs in the New Dreth Commonwealth, as the body politic of the Dewi system calls itself. In the century since the fall of the old Commonwealth, the best that the

Dreth people living in the Dewi system can hope for is survival. Any nebulous dreams of expansion in the Verge came to an end with the arrival of the *Monitor* in 2497. Although it never visited the distant Dewi system, the fortress ship carried with it more than enough interested parties from the Stellar Ring to crowd the region with competition and ambition.

Meanwhile, those same two characteristics cause enough trouble within the seven colonies. All of them make claims of supporting one another, but only in an emergency have they demonstrated any form of cohesion over the years.

The good news may be the slow changing of the guard that is taking place. The last members of the old Commonwealth have begun to leave public life, through simple retirement and old age. That leaves room for a new generation that remembers Kanar's goals of stronger solidarity between the colonies. There is a growing undercurrent of opinion among this generation that Kanar was right. They're led by various individuals, such as Will Eakin, Brian Corella, and Alita Spinner. Less tied to the old ways of the Stellar Ring, the younger generation can point to the success of the better-ordered stellar nations as an example of what the past called for and future may demand. The most authoritarian regimes have met with success over the last century, they say. How can we ignore their success, and the failure of decentralized and federated states such



as the Anarchist Union, Utopia Now!, and even the Commonwealth?

Home to a culture struggling to be true to its roots and yet still reinvent itself, the Dewi system is witnessing the rising of a new day for its inhabitants. The only question is exactly what will emerge. Who will be in charge? Is there any hope for a unified system, and will the Commonwealth ever rise up to be even a shadow of its former glory?

TO HELL WITH THE REST OF THE GALAXY . . .

The Dreth enjoy a singular advantage that very few of the independent-minded systems of the Verge can claim. In 2497 the *Poulton*, a cruiser in the service of the Galactic Concord, arrived in Dewi system. The Concord had been informed of the system and Dreth occupation of it before the *Monitor* even left Kendai, and the *Poulton* was dispatched to review the situation.

From aboard the *Monitor*, Michael Thayne assigned Concord ambassador Alfred Tomakis (Hm/Concord/DT0-8) and Concord Administrator Lodiri ba Tiras (Ft/Concord/MW-10) the task of analyzing the Dreth culture and determining its readiness to enter the galactic fold.

In the fulfillment of their duties, the two representatives went far beyond what anyone expected.

After three weeks in the system, the two Concord representatives issued a simple proclamation:

The Galactic Concord hereby recognizes the independence and sovereignty of the New Dreth Commonwealth, sole authority within the confines of Dewi star system.

Amazing as the proclamation was, inspiring jealousy in numerous systems—Oberon, Ptolemy, and Coulomb, to name only a few—the wording of the legal proclamation inspired a whole new round of debate. Since the Concord officially acknowledged the Dewi settlements as the New Dreth Commonwealth, it opened wide the possibility of other related claims. At first, many Dreth hoped to claim reparations for losses suffered during the Second Galactic War. Yet the Treaty of Concord had put aside that contentious issue in the interest of peace. Still, there were older treaties, signed between the old Commonwealth and numerous stellar nations, that the Concord had just allowed the possibility of reinvigorating. Most notably, this includes the Compact of Expansion, sealing an alliance now more than 150 years old.

TABLE 2: DEWI SYSTEM

	Belatu	Cadros	Amaethon	Caridwen
Primary	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi
Planetary Class	Class 5	Class 4	Class 5	Class 5
Gravity	G1 (0.39 g)	G1 (0.24 g)	G2 (1.07 g)	G2 (1.00 g)
Radiation	R5 (650 rem/hour)	R3 (45 rem/day)	R2 (8.2 rem/wk)	R1 (7.5 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)
Heat	H4-5 (400-3600° C)	H4 (145° C)	H2 (-24.4° C)	H1 (-71° C)
Orbital Distance	0.0033 AU	0.28 AU	0.64 AU	0.80 AU
Diameter	6,440 km	8,264 km	120,200 km	58,840 km
Year	3.47 hours	60.5 days	187 days	261 days
Day	3.47 hours	72.44 hours	25.57 hours	25.53 hours
Axial Tilt	0.0°	2.1°	14.2°	14.2°
Density	0.77	0.37	0.11	0.22
# Satellites	0	1	28	10

	Gwydion	Dylan	Bran	Arianrhod	Pwyll
Primary	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi
Planetary Class	Class 5	Class 5	Class 5	Class 4	Class 4
Gravity	G1 (0.57 g)	G2 (0.88 g)	G2 (0.95 g)	G0 (0.06 g)	G0 (0.05 g)
Radiation	R3 (45 rem/day)	R3 (67 rem/day)	R2 (15 rem/wk)	R3 (34 rem/day)	R4 (400 rem/hr)
Atmosphere	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A0 (trace)	A0 (vacuum)
Pressure	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)	P0 (0 atm)	P5 (0 atm)
Heat	H1 (-161° C)	H1 (-171° C)	H0 (-221° C)	H0 (-228° C)	H0 (-232° C)
Orbital Distance	2.38 AU	3.64 AU	14.05 AU	18.54 AU	26.10 AU
Diameter	66,100 km	49,500 km	37,500 km	5,405 km	3,660 km
Year	4.11 years	7.76 years	58.88 years	79.83 years	133.34 years
Day	14.51 hours	11.5 hours	29.5 hours	153.6 hours	59.1 hours
Axial Tilt	38.0°	0.0°	0.0°	65.7°	35.0°
Density	0.11	0.23	0.32	0.13	0.17
# Satellites	14	9	6	0	0

Even other Concord officials seemed taken aback at the Pandora's box that the two representatives had opened. Yet none of them seemed willing to overturn the decision, and so it stood until ultimately ratified by the Galactic Court in 2500. Moreover, few of the stellar nations seemed to find it worth their while to absorb the public-relations disaster that would result from trying to strongarm the last bastion of Dreth society. Of course, some representative of the Concord managed to express disapproval by permanently assigning Administrator Tiras and Ambassador Tomakis to this distant corner of space, suspending what looked to be promising careers for both of them.

Just what inspired the Concord delegates to so favor the Dreth was and remains open to question. Surely Tomakis and Tiras had some idea of the diplomatic importance of their proclamation. Why, then? Tomakis was, before joining the Concord, a Rigunmor, and many believe that he harbored a sense of guilt about his nation's cooperation in the demise of the old Commonwealth. Others scoffed at the notion of a Rigunmor, even one who chose to join the Concord, having so healthy a conscience. A recovered document—the infamous “to hell with the rest of the galaxy” memo Tomakis addressed to Tiras—may reveal that Tomakis simply hoped to cause trouble.

Tiras' motivations have never been explained, despite her continued presence in the star system. For more information on the Concord and other stellar nations' presence within the Dewi star system, see “International Relations” later in this chapter.

BELATU

The first Dreth to approach Belatu christened it with the name of a fire-god and the epithet “today I found all the fires of Hell.” On the dayside of Belatu, the temperature averages in excess of 3000° C—enough to render its surface a giant ocean of liquified metals and compounds. For while the planet's interior cooled long ago, today the surface contains all the heat the planet could want, and more.

Doomed Belatu stands in its last days—in astronomical terms. Like most planets so close to their parents, it has become tidally locked; one side of it always faces the star. And now the tides on Belatu's rocks stretch and twist the planet as the half nearer to the star feels a greater pull than the distant half. Within a million years, rocky Belatu will be torn to pieces by the stress of Dewi's gravity. With each passing month, an average of five or six significant (6.0 or higher magnitude on the venerable Richter scale) quakes rock the planet's surface. Milder quakes and aftershocks occur almost daily. Belatu's shakes, as they are called, create waves and ripples over its liquid metal surface, in a parody of a water ocean.

Meanwhile, Belatu's perpetual nightside is cool enough to allow for a solid continental surface and numerous solid islands. With advanced construction techniques and gravit-

ically enhanced fortifications, even the quakes don't present an obstacle to human life. What does, however, are Dewi's solar flares. Great clouds of plasma surge upward from the star's surface, with concentrated jets reaching up to 300,000 kilometers. Less concentrated clouds of superheated gas can lick over Belatu, raising the temperature of the planet another few thousand degrees and causing great electromagnetic storms.

THE BELATU RESEARCH FACILITY

The earthquakes and intense heat would seem to make Belatu totally worthless. Yet planets so close to their star's surface (only about 500,000 kilometers, for Belatu) are rare. So Belatu is an ideal location for solar research, which is very active even around main-sequence stars such as Dewi. In 2460, scientists of the Lauceston colony spent most of their budget for the decade on the construction of a research facility located near Belatu's equator on the nightside of the planet, in its coolest and darkest region, the center of its largest landmass. The facility stands as a marvel of engineering strength and cleverness as scientists and engineers devised new tricks to defeat heat, magnetism, and planetquake. But even these measures aren't perfect. A single mistake can lead to death on Belatu. To date, over thirty researchers have lost their lives.

Staffed by about a hundred scientists, the Belatu station is largely forgotten among the daily news and current events of the Dreth. The only time it draws attention to itself is in the rare instance of a direct strike near the planet by one of Dewi's solar flares. It has happened four times since the station's construction, and each time the facility has survived, mostly intact despite significant structural damage, while its inhabitants hastily evacuated to a safe distance from Belatu and Dewi. Without constant monitoring of Dewi's turbulent surface and the tangled magnetic fields, the scientists could be surprised—and killed—by the manifestation of a sunspot's sudden release.

FREEDOM PAID

In 2477, Leslie Adams (XI/Dreth/DT0-7), announced that the facility, under negotiated agreement with the New Dreth Commonwealth and the colonial leadership of Lauceston, was now a privately held facility called the Belatu Research Board (BRB). The scientific team has adopted a strictly apolitical stance when dealing with both the squabbling Dreth colonies and visitors from the stellar nations.

No longer beholden to a single colony, the BRB accepts donations from any source and in turn promises to make its discoveries available to the public and the greater scientific community. Several stellar nations, including the Orlamu Theocracy, Austrin-Ontis Unlimited, and a very generous Thuldan Empire, have become contributors.

Though communication to the facility often suffers long delays, it's now possible for the BRB to exchange data with

THE DRETH COMMONWEALTH

"For the progress of sentient life everywhere, the monstrosity known as VoidCorp must be expunged from the galaxy."

—Joshua Kanar, September 2388

The Dreth Commonwealth, for all intents and purposes, is no more. It is one of many stellar nations whose existence as a political state came to an end in the middle years of GW2 at the hands of Rignunmor naval vessels and the treachery of VoidCorp. Yet the memory of great days and great dreams lives on. Through music, poetry, and stories, the Dreth remember. On Dreth worlds occupied by their hated enemies, in marginal settlements of Dreth in Concord space, and in a small system at the edge of human space, the Dreth remember.

HISTORY

Generally, the development of the stellar nations followed one of two courses. Either a corporation, government, or private individual sponsored their creation, as is the case with the Thuldan Empire, VoidCorp, and the Orlamu Theocracy, or the nation formed through consolidation, confederation, or conquest. Various forms of this model can be found in StarMech, the Orion League, the Nariac Domain, and the former Dreth Commonwealth.

The Dreth Commonwealth occupied space that includes most of present-day Insight and some sectors within the Rignunmor Star Consortium. But before the Dreth Commonwealth existed, there was only the planet Dreth, colonized by several hundred thousand people in the latter half of the 22nd century. The original expedition was sponsored by one of the nations of Earth that had fled to Jupiter's Ganymede after the formation of Earth's six superpowers. But by the time the Dreth colony was up and running, this nation had been absorbed into the European Union, one of the same growing superpowers of the Sol system.

The loss of a patron didn't worry Rachel Dooley, the prime minister of Dreth at the time. After all, the colonial star system contained a rich new home and room to grow. The colonists had found no fewer than three beautiful, Earthlike (Class 1) worlds within the binary star system; Dreth was only one of them. Over the next few decades, the colony grew and expanded under Dooley's enlightened leadership. She championed a great number of freedoms and personal liberties for the inhabitants of Dreth, allowing local leaders to address most needs without national intervention. Attracted by the prospects in the region, thousands—and eventually millions—of additional immigrants made their way to the Dreth star system as well as others nearby.

As the largest colony, it fell upon the inhabitants of Dreth to take a leadership role in the area. They formed a confederate state, first including all settlements in their star system and eventually an expanding radius of star systems. Officially, the Dreth Commonwealth came into existence, recognized as a colonial government by the Terran Empire, in 2258. Meanwhile, since the Dreth had no strong ties back to Earth, none of Commonwealth's neighbors saw the Dreth Commonwealth as a force of oppression.

By the start of the First Galactic War, the Commonwealth had grown to include almost two hundred colonized star systems in its sphere of influence, and thousands more unsettled stars within the region of space it could claim as its own. The seat of government had been moved to Adalcus, closer to the center of Dreth space. Yet entanglements with the increasingly aggressive Terran Empire had bred a strong suspicion of centralized government into the Dreth culture and body politic. Even as the Commonwealth grew in size, its individual systems and planets offered up less and less authority and responsibility to the national government.

Meanwhile, more than a century of independence had begun to mold the Dreth character. Where once the people of this fledgling stellar nation had little in common, some shared cultural traits began to emerge among them. The first and most important of these was a drive for the perfection of the individual. The Dreth became enthralled with the notion of personal achievement, and the society gave birth to this new philosophy, akin to humanism, but inviting itself to all sentients in the egalitarian Commonwealth.

Just what that idealistic quest meant depended on each person's own desires. Some strove for athletic perfection, others intellectual, and still others looked to reform whole societies and find new ways to enhance cooperation among peoples and maintain the greatest possible individual freedoms. Outside of the Commonwealth, foreigners often characterized the Dreth as dreamers and romantics, with all their talk about perfection of the body and spirit. For the Dreth, however, perfection was all about action, and no dream of bettering oneself or the world was worthwhile until put into motion.

Now leading one of the ten largest stellar nations, Sean Barnes, Dooley's successor, became actively involved in the coalition to oppose the Terran Empire, joining the Thuldan Empire and others to combat Earth-based tyranny. Victorious, the Dreth Commonwealth nonetheless sustained heavy losses throughout GW1, not only against the Terran Empire, but during occasional skirmishes with both of its neighbors: VoidCorp and the Rignunmor Star Consortium. Conflicts with these two nations were a dark prophecy of the terrible days to come.

THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

Acclaimed publicly as the dreamers and idealists of the 23rd and 24th centuries, the Dreth and the doom of their culture have been the subject of uncounted historical reviews and tragic performances, in media ranging from documentary literature to the most romantic of holofilms. For the Dreth people however, it is a tale of woe and ultimately betrayal.

The Dreth Commonwealth was little prepared for war when it came in 2342. So in exchange for peace, they formed an early alliance—even before the formation of the Expansion Pentad—with the most powerful of their neighbors, VoidCorp. The bond formed was never an easy one. VoidCorp executives tended to view the agreement as tantamount to a surrender of sovereignty; to them, the Commonwealth was little more than a client state. For the Dreth, however, VoidCorp arms and assistance meant the difference between survival and extinction.

Yet it wasn't enough against the well-funded Rigmors, who benefited from large, friendly borders during those days. The destruction of the Dreth flagship fleet was a terrible blow in 2380, and it signaled a massive retreat along the Commonwealth-Consortium border. But the Dreth still had hopes for a fleet forming around the capital of Adalcus, and even the possibility of a negotiated settlement with the Rigmors. VoidCorp fleets crushed any notions of recovery with a treacherous invasion of the Commonwealth, ending at Adalcus in 2386. The Commonwealth, divided by two hostile powers, was no more.

The signing of the Treaty of Concord made official the old Dreth Commonwealth's extinction.

TODAY

Several billion Dreth have survived. Most of them became and remain citizens of occupied territory: some of these in the Consortium, but most of them in the space now claimed by Insight. In Dreth space, Insight found the most fertile ground for rebellion against VoidCorp; for different reasons, both Inseers and the Dreth have reasons to loathe the megacorporation. Dreth citizens comprise almost a third of Insight regular military. Yet even though the Inseers have demonstrated great kindness to the Dreth that survived, including rights to whole cities with regional autonomy, Inseer space and culture remain alien; the Dreth can no longer truly call it home.

Smaller Dreth settlements, scattered throughout explored space and beyond, have become a common sight. The three Concord protectorates contain a number of Dreth colonies. Meanwhile, a single star system within the Verge has become home to a Dreth government-in-exile, which, although occasionally petitioning for international status, has turned inward, as if to mourn former glories. The Dreth culture survives, but the unified society is only memory.

PLAYING A DRETH

One might think that the reversals of fortune endured by the Dreth would foster souls full of bitterness and resentment. It's just not true. Surely, Dreth old enough to remember express sadness, but even they can't abandon the pursuit of excellence that lies at the core of the Dreth ideal. They're simply too active to surrender themselves.

Most Dreth maintain a belief that centralized government only leads to the erosion of individual liberty. Indeed, the most conservative elements of Dreth society prefer not to grant any real authority to a national government. These beliefs are countered by a growing "progressive" movement, which believes that only through a central authority, albeit one limited to external affairs and defense, can the Dreth hope to prevail against their enemies.

It has often been said that with the razing of Adalcus and Dreth itself by VoidCorp ships, humanity lost something that it has yet to recover. Dreth culture had a number of things to distinguish it. Vibrant and energetic, the people of the Commonwealth used the work-free time and long lives that technology had given them in the interests of improving themselves and the galaxy in which they lived. Open and egalitarian, the Commonwealth allowed sentient and even marginally sentient species full rights under their law. They represented, and not merely in their own opinion, many of the best qualities that humanity had to offer.

Today it's tragic, say some, that a taint now shadows the once-bright Dreth spirit. So many Dreth now dedicate their lives to the pursuit of vengeance against VoidCorp. Since the end of the war, it's often a difficult waiting game as a Dreth works slowly, subtly, and even deceptively, all with the goal of bringing harm to the leadership of VoidCorp.

GAME BENEFITS

Dreth heroes begin play with no special advantage or unique skill to distinguish them. But the quest for excellence continues, even as they hunt and are hunted by their enemies. A Dreth hero who purchases achievement benefits (see Chapter 8: Achievements in the *Player's Handbook*) pays only half the listed cost for his or her Profession (round up). All the normal rules, level minimums, and restrictions on purchasing multiple benefits apply.



researchers in all of human space. But the station does not garner universal support. In the eyes of many of the more conservative Arriver scientists, the BRB is literally playing with fire, recklessly endangering the lives of its gifted scholars and researchers. It's a miracle that the facility hasn't been destroyed already. Of course, the same critics don't neglect to study carefully the data that pour out of the BRB.

ACCUSATION

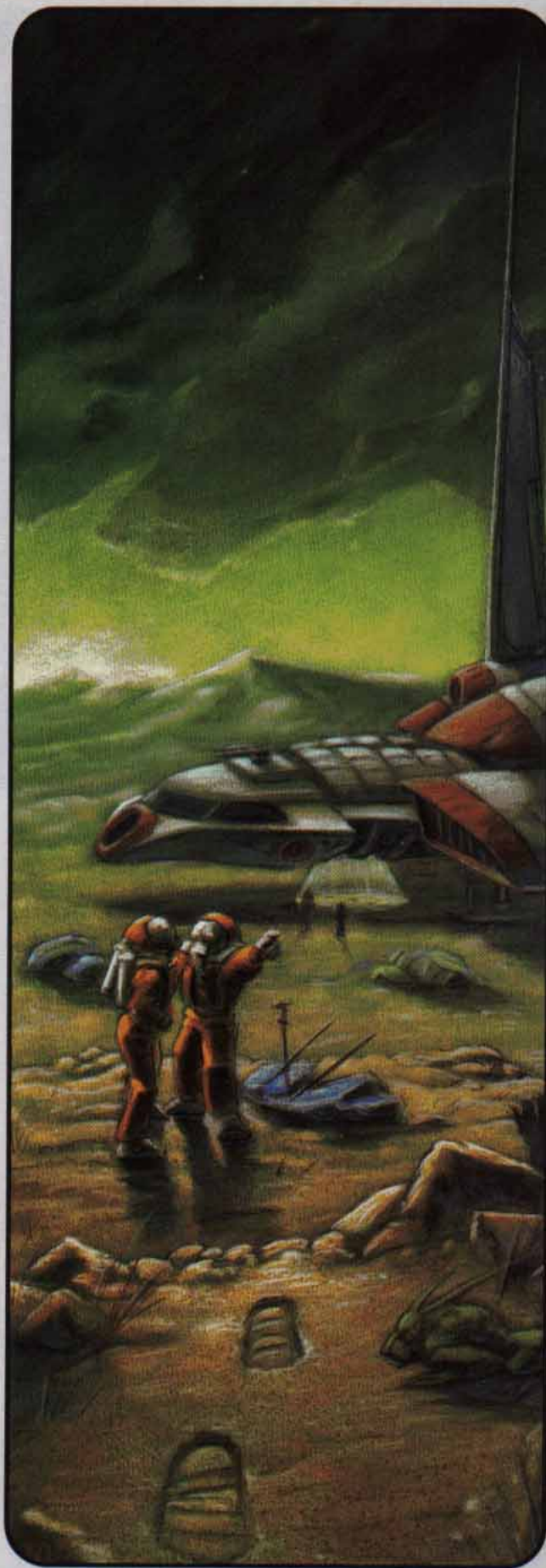
In May of 2502, a spokesperson for the Austrin-Ontis Scientific Pioneering Committee—the same organization that has since 2498 donated millions of dollars each year to the BRB—held a press conference on Ferrand. While expressing his remarks in a careful and diplomatic manner, Geoffrey Biggs (Hm/Austrin/DTC-4) charged that the BRB had not lived up to its pledge of complete and free disclosure of data. Specifically, the Austrin claimed that long stretches of sensory blackout during the first two months of the year were being used to cover secret solar testing.

Biggs has promised that evidence of the BRB's clandestine activity is forthcoming, and he expects that without immediate and complete access to BRB data, his backers and numerous others will withdraw their support of the research facility. Leslie Adams, speaking for the BRB, denied any wrongdoing and invited the Austrins and any concerned parties to an unusual conference on the surface of Belatu. The rare opportunity to visit Belatu has already done much to win local and interstellar opinion favoring the Dreth scientists. As a result, most of the other BRB contributors have remained neutral on this issue while they look forward to attending the Belatu Conference, to be held in October of this year. The event is scheduled to coincide with the appearance of comet Hitaki-Adams, a sungrazer that will pass through the narrow window between Belatu and Dewi, then swing around quickly and head out into deep space. At present, more than a hundred guests have accepted the invitation to witness the majesty of a star at such close range.

MELT MINING

The existence of tons of metal, much of it in a relatively pure state between quakes, presents a tempting target for a new form of industrialism within the Dewi star system. At present, not even any of the stellar nations has pioneered the means to extract safely and efficiently the valuable molten minerals from Belatu, but that hasn't stopped industrial teams from several of the New Dreth states from attempting it.

Every few months or so, a team of engineers arrives on Belatu ready with some new scheme. A recent project involves the rapid cooling and seizure of a section of the metal ocean using expensive supercoolant systems mounted on large freighters. Tractor beams and even explosives have been used to pull or blast the valuable metals away





from the surface to waiting ships. With each passing attempt, the pioneers step closer to profitability; they also gain the attention of observers from the Stellar Ring who might seek to purchase or copy the ingenuity that the Dreth forge in Belatu's cauldron.

CADROS

For all of the conditions that would make it more likely to support life—a nonmolten surface, protection from radiation and geologic stability, among others—Cadros has won little of the attention that Belatu has. It's still inhospitable, but in a more conventional fashion. Given the presence of the more comfortable moons of Amaethon and Caridwen, Cadros seems destined to an insignificant and lonely existence.

AMAETHON

Between the two Jovian worlds of Amaethon and Caridwen lies the heart of the New Dreth Commonwealth. Of course, neither of the two giants draws much attention for themselves. At best, they represent abundant sources of hydrogen fuel and a few noble gases. Instead, interest in the system focuses on the lunar bodies orbiting the gas giants lying at the heart of Dewi's habitable band.

AMAETHON'S MINOR MOONS

A total of twenty-eight natural satellites have been titled moons by Dreth astronomers. Of these, more than half are irrelevant asteroids that fell into Amaethon's gravity well. Even the largest of this group has a diameter measuring no more than 500 kilometers across. At the other end of the spectrum, five of the most massive have enough mass to hold onto atmospheres of their own.

Penzance, one of these and the closest to Amaethon, suffers forever under the strong electromagnetic field of Amaethon. Moreover, much like the planet Belatu, it is slowly being torn asunder by the gravity of its parent.

Other uninhabited moons of Amaethon include Cherbourg, the second moon, and Nyons, the seventh. Like Penzance, they only see use as sources of small mining concerns, as the absence of significant heavy metals on these worlds make them none too attractive for development. Cherbourg, in addition, has seen some activity as the Galactic Concord has made it an official base of operations in the system. The Concord maintains a single small domed town on Cherbourg. Both the ambassador and the Administrator spend most of their time on Ferrand working closely with the New Dreth government.

Lorient, Amaethon's third moon, possesses characteristics that all of the gas giant's four inhabited moons enjoy: a warm climate, tolerable levels of gravity, and weak radiation. That's the good news. The bad news is that Lorient also shares a poisonous atmosphere dominated by sulfur compounds. Fortunately, the sulfur dioxides and trioxides do not penetrate buildings on the surface, but outside the connecting tubes of homes, apartments, shopping districts, and manufacturing centers, the denizens of Lorient must wear filter masks. Most of them in fact prefer a vacuum mask and air supply, just to be safe. For trips outside longer than an hour, the Dreth usually wear soft e-suits to avoid skin contact with the toxic atmosphere.

Lorient lacks significant seas or oceans of any kind. It is a dry world, compared to its neighbors. The occasional electrical storms that erupt rarely bring much rainfall. A "rainy season" occurs once a year during which part of Lorient's surface receives significantly more water than usual, although much of the rain is acidic.

Although Lorient was first thought to be completely devoid of native life, biologist Stan Schmidt recently announced the discovery of bacterial microbes living in the clay of many of Lorient's dry lakeshores and riverbeds. As the bacteria are completely harmless to humans, they are merely an object of curiosity; millions if not billions of years will have to pass before the planet's life reaches multicellular development that could make it interesting to other sentient species, including humanity. That assumes that human development on Lorient doesn't make the issue moot long before evolution has its chance.

THE YOUNGEST OF SEVEN

Lorient is the first of Amaethon's moons to possess a sig-

DEWI POPULATION 4,530,523 SENTIENTS

Human	91%		
Orion	1%	Austrin	0%
Thuldan	3%	Nariac	0%
Orlamu	0%	Insight	3%
Rigunmor	1%	Hatire	0%
Solar	1%	Borealin	1%
VoidCorp	0%	StarMech	0%
Concord	0%	Independent	90%
		(Dreth 85%)	
Alien	9%		
Sesheyan	67%	T'sa	2%
Mechalus	17%	Weren	6%
Fraal	8%		

nificant population, but the youngest of the seven Dreth colonies by several years. Its founding came at the end of the decade of division that birthed the semi-independent moon-states. Psychologically and politically, this has had an effect on its relations with the other moon-states of the New Dreth Commonwealth.

The inhabitants of Lorient consist mostly of the colonists from Jelant, a world located not far from what was once the Dreth-Rigunmor border. Thanks to their outgoing Rigunmor neighbors, the Jelants were historically considered among the most cosmopolitan and open-minded of the Dreth. Although they never wavered far from mainstream Dreth culture, the influence of another stellar nation helped to dispel some of the common Dreth distrust of centralized government. That's why Joshua Kanar came to the Jelants for his expedition more than a century ago. It's also why they were the last to abandon the idea of a more united Dreth

"ALL THE FIRES OF HELL"

Trying to survive on the surface of Belatu is a short-lived exercise in foolishness. Follow the standard rules using the GRAPH system (see Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action in the *Gamemaster Guide*). On the dayside of the planet, extreme H5 (Inferno) conditions prevail. Only on the coolest center of the nightside does the planet dip down into H4 conditions and temperatures below 500° C. With skill checks every phase to avoid damage, at a cumulative penalty, even characters in hard e-suits will be dead within 30 seconds, long before the problems of radiation can come into play.

Even starships navigating this close to Dewi must be careful. Landing an unmodified vessel on Belatu's cool side is tricky, given the planet's high rate of revolution around the star (one orbit about every 2 hours), requiring a Navigation-system navigation skill check at a +2 step penalty. Exposure to temperatures in excess of 3000° C is dangerous to starships not specifically designed to handle such conditions. For each hour that a vessel spends within Belatu's orbit exposed to the sun, each of its compartments suffer 2d4 wound points of energy (En) damage. Meanwhile, the vessel's armor will slowly be eaten away by the constant heat. Each hour permanently subtracts 1 point from the armor's effectiveness. A shipyard can repair the vessel, but only if it survives the trip back to safer climes.

If a hero wants to customize a vessel specifically to survive super-Inferno conditions, it's possible to modify a ship using technology of the day so that it can survive temperatures of up to 5,000° C with regular maintenance. Installing such systems cost 20% of a vessel's total durability and *1,000,000 per 10 durability points of the ship.

society during the revolution on Ferrand. And it helps to explain the real situation on Lorient today.

POLITICS OF REFORM

Publicly, Marc Sasso (Hm/Dreth/NP) leads a democratic society representing some three hundred thousand people living on Lorient. Most of the population is concentrated in a single capital city named Jelant (all seven of the colonies eventually adopted this tradition to honor their former homes). The small population, focused around only a few industrial facilities, makes the colony relatively easy for Sasso to lead. Not counting service employees such as police and emergency rescue personnel, Sasso requires the presence of fewer than one hundred individuals in his cabinet.

Lorient's population stands at the forefront of the reborn unification movement. Never truly forsaken, the dream of a more unified New Dreth Commonwealth here in the Dewi system—and perhaps someday beyond—slumbered fitfully without its onetime leader, the exiled Joshua Kanar. Quietly and slowly, Sasso has pushed for political accord between the seven colonies, greater federal power and decision-making in a federated New Dreth Commonwealth. Most of the other colonial leaders recognize Sasso as an agitating liberal, but resistance to the ideas he represents has crumbled over the last decade. It helps that on Ferrand, Brian Corella defends Sasso's political stance as a viable pursuit even as he hopes that federal Commonwealth power would fall on his own shoulders. Even more conservative Dreth in the system have grown more likely to listen to Sasso's arguments in the face of so many newcomers to the Verge.

The other leaders might not be so forgiving of Sasso's reformative proposals if they knew what Lorient has hidden and protected for more than a century. Although few know of his presence, the venerable Joshua Kanar has been secretly living here ever since his exile. Even as he advises Sasso and advocates change among contacts he has on all seven of the colonies, public opinion and even the public education system still vilify his memory as a schemer, manipulator, and would-be dictator. Of course, public opinion may be right. Certainly that would be the belief should his presence on Lorient become publicized.

FERRAND

Geologically, Ferrand is Lorient's twin. Its medium size, tolerable heat, sulfur atmosphere, and small hydrosphere are duplicated on Lorient. Here, the similarities end. Whereas on its sister moon, no significant native life exists, on Ferrand several species of plant and animal life have evolved in the three billion years that the moon has orbited Amaethon. In fact, evolutionary development on Ferrand has progressed further than anywhere else in the system, with more than seven hundred thousand independent species so far cataloged. Unfortunately, none if any of the native life has much to offer to people without an academic interest. Animal life-

forms are mostly made up of soft-shelled lizards that survive by consuming small plants and bacteria in the soil. None of the animal species demonstrates even the first flickers of sentience, but fortunately for them, none has much potential as domesticated labor or food.

Just what to do with the native life on Ferrand has been a vexing question for the Dreth. At first, it was the very existence of the native flora and fauna that brought about Kanar's original settlement of Ferrand. If nothing else came of the discovery, the presence of life on Ferrand, as different from humanity and other species as it was, still indicated the moon had the capability to support a long-term population.

Today, though, the question may be whether the native life or the humans who come here determine the biological destiny of the world. Just over one million people live on Ferrand, making it the most populous of the seven moons. Here, the possibility of terraforming—and by necessity destroying the natural habitat—has never been acted upon, but it is a political issue that refuses to die.

Perhaps because of that possibility, at least one step has been taken to transplant thousands of lifeforms from Ferrand to the rest of the moons of Amaethon with a similar ecology: Lorient, Lousanne, and Arles. The plan has met with a great deal of success, especially on Lousanne.

FIRST AMONG MANY

Brian Corella (Hm/Dreth/CS-4), a former policeman, rose to power on the only one of the moon-states that makes a serious pursuit of politics. Elected to the position of governor in 2490, he has been reelected to six consecutive two-year terms. Corella takes a rather personal view on the hottest issue for the Dreth Commonwealth: unification under a single federal government. He's not against it, although he's more cautious than his neighbor Sasso in supporting the idea. Instead, he just wants to make sure that it's on Ferrand that this new government finds its home, preferably with himself at the helm of the federal state.

Ferrand does have a few things going for it, in addition to the large population. It's already the nominal capital of the New Dreth Commonwealth by virtue of the monthly Commonwealth Council meetings held there. Furthermore, Ferrand has two of Dewi's cruisers, half the naval might of the system.

It also has Chelt, the capital city of the moon. Named for an Old Dreth Commonwealth planet, the "urban sprawl of the Dewi system" is home to 670,000 people. It's the oldest settlement, with monuments to the accomplishments of its first leader, Kathryn Barker, and even her husband, the reviled Joshua Kanar. Chelt formed the basis of Dreth construction through the Dewi system. Instead of the more traditional pattern for these environments, including large domes and massive structures to contain an artificial zone of protection, each Dreth building is independently sealed to protect its comfortable environment. Each building has its own airlock

TABLE 3: AMAETHON'S MAJOR MOONS

	Lorient	Ferrand	Lousanne	Arles
Primary	Amaethon	Amaethon	Amaethon	Amaethon
Planetary Class	Class 2	Class 2	Class 2	Class 2
Gravity	G1 (0.47 g)	G1 (0.63 g)	G2 (0.99 g)	G2 (1.04 g)
Radiation	R1 (5 rem/yr)	R2 (50 rem/yr)	R1 (8 rem/yr)	R1 (0.7 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A3 (SO ₂ , SO ₃)	A3 (SO ₂ , SO ₃)	A3 (SO ₂ , SO ₃)	A3 (SO ₂ , SO ₃)
Pressure	P2 (1.05 atm)	P2 (1.2 atm)	P2 (0.91 atm)	P3 (1.33 atm)
Heat	H2 (40° C)	H2 (37° C)	H2 (27° C)	H2 (30° C)
Orbital Distance	0.24 AU	0.48 AU	0.89 AU	1.31 AU
Diameter	5,580 km	6,812 km	11,758 km	14,302 km
Year	45.3 days	128 days	323 days	577 days
Day	19.8 hours	34 days	29.5 hours	22.8 hours
Axial Tilt	4.9°	49.4°	18.3°	1°
Density	1.07	1.18	0.97	1.02
# Satellites	0	0	0	0

where normally a simple door would be. Short sealed tubes—averaging 10 meters wide—make up the majority of Chelt's transit system, crisscrossing on the surface and dozens of meters above the ground. The tubes see much use; most Chelt citizens go to extreme efforts to avoid donning an environmental suit and walking around outside. Small electric trams that seat up to four obviate the need for constant marching, although pedestrian traffic dominates the tubes. The architectural design represents a more expensive choice, balanced only by the large average size of individual buildings. What the multiple independent systems do offer, though, is a level of environmental security that few domed settlements can hope to achieve. Should one building be breached, it has no effect on the stability of the others.

THE DRETH COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL

Each month, three delegates from each of the seven moon-states come together in Chelt to discuss "subjects of mutual concern." In other words, these meetings focus on disputes between the colonies and relations with foreigners. Rarely do matters concerning a single moon-state (for example, terraforming Ferrand) surface during these conferences, and rarely does one moon-state use this forum to make a direct appeal for assistance from another.

The constitution of the New Dreth Commonwealth strongly favors the autonomy of each moon-state. In order to pass any accord, a four-sevenths majority (twelve) of the delegates must agree. Complicating matters is the right of individual governments of each of the seven moons to veto any decision of the Council. Only a three-quarters majority (sixteen delegates) may overrule such a veto. In other words, just about every other moon-state's representatives would have to agree to overturn the veto of a single moon's government.

Despite the difficulties, some Dreth say that the Council has begun to change already and that Sasso (and thus Kanar) can claim some victory. Whereas once the Council only met for a single day, now it's common for the delegates to sit in discussions that average four or five days of each month.

Several times in the last year, the Council has remained in session for two weeks or more. Moreover, whereas once each moon-state simply chose three respected citizens to send, in the last decade there has been a move, now part of accepted policy, that the governor or chief executive of each moon attend the Council as leader of the delegation.

In short, the Council has great potential to grow into a federal legislature that represents the entirety of the New Dreth Commonwealth. What it lacks, thanks to the Dreth nature, is an executive who can lead the Commonwealth based on the Council's decisions. That's not to say, though, that plenty of contenders for such a position haven't made evident their interest in assuming the mantle of leadership.

THE CO-ORBITERS

Lousanne and Arles share a single orbit, and so it's difficult to describe which moon ranks fifth or sixth in Amaethon's order. Precise measurements by the survey team revealed that Lousanne's center orbits Amaethon at an average distance only 234 kilometers closer than Arles'. The two moons are in the same orbital path, but they do not collide, the result of a principle of physics known as resonance.

Scientists have understood this phenomenon that allows two orbiting objects of similar mass to orbit one another since the early days of interplanetary exploration, when they discovered the movements of the tiny co-orbital satellites of Saturn, Janus and Epithemis. The two satellites, in this case Lousanne and Arles, forever go faster and slower in the orbit, only to drop back a bit before they're about to touch. As the moon in the lower orbit approaches the moon in higher orbit (the force of gravity keeps the lower moon traveling slightly faster since it's closer to the planet), the gravity of the satellite ahead pulls it into a slightly higher orbit, where it slows down. Meanwhile, the higher-orbiting satellite is pulled into a lower orbit, where it speeds up. Over the course of several days, a perfect interchange is completed and repeated with each spin around Amaethon.

JOSHUA KANAR DEWI SYSTEM REBEL

Level 9 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 9	(0)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 9		PER 11	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed Attack 9/4/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
9mm ch pistol 12/6/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	HI/0

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [9]; Unarmed Attack [9]; Modern [11]—*pistol* [12]; Vehicle [9]—*space* [10]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [12]—*computer* [14], *language: Standard* [15]; Law [12]; Navigation [12]; Physical Science [12]; Tactics [12]—*infantry* [14], *space* [13]; Administration [11]; Awareness [11]; Resolve [11]; Culture [11]—*diplomacy* [12]; *etiquette: Dreth* [14]; Interaction [11]—*bargain* [13], *charm* [14]; Leadership [11]—*inspire* [16].

At 194 years old, Joshua Kanar can no longer escape time's grasp. After decades of anti-aging treatments, genetic therapy, and careful maintenance, Kanar at last appears old. Wrinkled and worn by time, Kanar can expect to live only another decade before his body fails him. He has spent most of his life in the Dewi star system, but now the old man, as he is uncharitably called by his friends, is a criminal whose life would be forfeit should his presence in the system be discovered.

For decades following his absurd trial for treason and sedition, Kanar sulked quietly on Lorient, depressed and mourning his defeat and the loss of his culture. He had nowhere else to go, so he risked his life to stay near the only existence he knew. But by 2465 Kanar had quietly reentered the field of politics after a meeting with Janet Delman, governor of Lorient and Sasso's predecessor. Since then, Kanar has used every trick he knows to agitate for change. Slowly, perhaps, it maybe working; a new generation of Dreth, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the colonies' founders, have begun to question their leaders' decision to follow the Old Dreth way and remain fragmented into seven separate states. To them, solidarity can be couched as part of a greater quest, a chance for all Dreth to strive for excellence in a greater galaxy. When this new group rises to power, perhaps Kanar can return from the shadows—if he survives that long.

From Lousanne's or Arles' surface, the experience is thrilling and even a little scary. They can watch as their sister moon closes in to only a few thousand kilometers, filling the day and night sky, before the exchange is complete and the pursuing moon loses velocity and its quarry hastens along. Newcomers to the moons, even if they understand the gravitic mechanics perfectly, can't help feeling a bit nervous about the regular near-impact.

It's ironic that the frequent proximity between the two moons hasn't resulted in close relations and strong bonds between the Dreth living on them. At their closest point, a sealed skycar could brave the distance between the two satellites without the need for a spaceship of any kind. Yet beyond the economic traffic and exchange of goods that one might expect, the two moons share little else.

LOUSANNE

Lousanne resembles in most ways all of the inhabited moons around Amaethon: marginally habitable with reasonable temperature, gravity, and barometric pressure, and low levels of radiation. Much like Lorient and Ferrand, the atmosphere is dominated by sulfur dioxides and surface water is relatively rare; indeed Lousanne could be described as a near-twin of Ferrand as much as Arles.

Water makes Lousanne somewhat different from all of the other moon-states. Nearly 20% of Lousanne's crust is covered over with small seas, lakes, and rivers. While it still makes Lousanne a dry world in comparison with many terrestrial planets, in this system it provides most of the water necessary for survival of growing populations and for the industry that has outgrown all others on the moon.

Agriculture on Lousanne supplies the people of the Dewi system with just over half the food they eat. The rest comes mostly from hydroponic and enclosed-habitat farms on other moons and, to a lesser degree, imports from other star systems. The lack of animal products in the system presents no great obstacle; the Dreth in the Dewi system have depended exclusively on vegetarian fare for generations. Ironically, Lousanne is the home of a fast-growing fauna population as leaders of Ferrand transplant some of their native species. Here, they are shepherded into great preserves, watched and bred carefully by Lousanne zoologists.

The human population on Lousanne stands out as the most conservative of the seven moon-states. Few major corporations or large industries cover the planet, and most Dreth cultivate crops and lead private lives of study. Bound up in their historical and philosophical pursuits, the people of Lousanne have been the slowest to adapt to the new way of life in the Verge.

Bastone Apple (Hm/Dreth/DT0-4) is the most vocal supporter of the "status quo" mentality; this, he believes, preserves the strong independence of each Dreth state, and thus the liberty of its people. Apple follows the leadership

of Daphne Rice, the leader of the conservative Dewi faction, without much ambition. While Rice may desire to bring back into line the wayward federalist Dreth in the system, Apple represents the bedrock of practicality, a trait that many consider uncommon in the perfectionist Dreth. Even his political opponents maintain a high opinion of Apple, and he can win the respect of the masses as well.

CEMBRIA HIGHLANDS

Without water to divide itself, the single megacontinent of Lousanne has only its mountains to act as barrier to travel and weather. The Cembria Highlands are, without question, the most extreme topology to be seen on the moon's surface. The storms and winds help to weather even Lousanne's dry geography, but the mountains and hills that ring Cembria make it one of the most isolated regions. Ironically, Cembria's also ideally located near the lunar equator and the temperate band; rivers running through and off the highlands also provide some of the best regions for settlement. All told, it represents several thousand square kilometers of prime real estate.

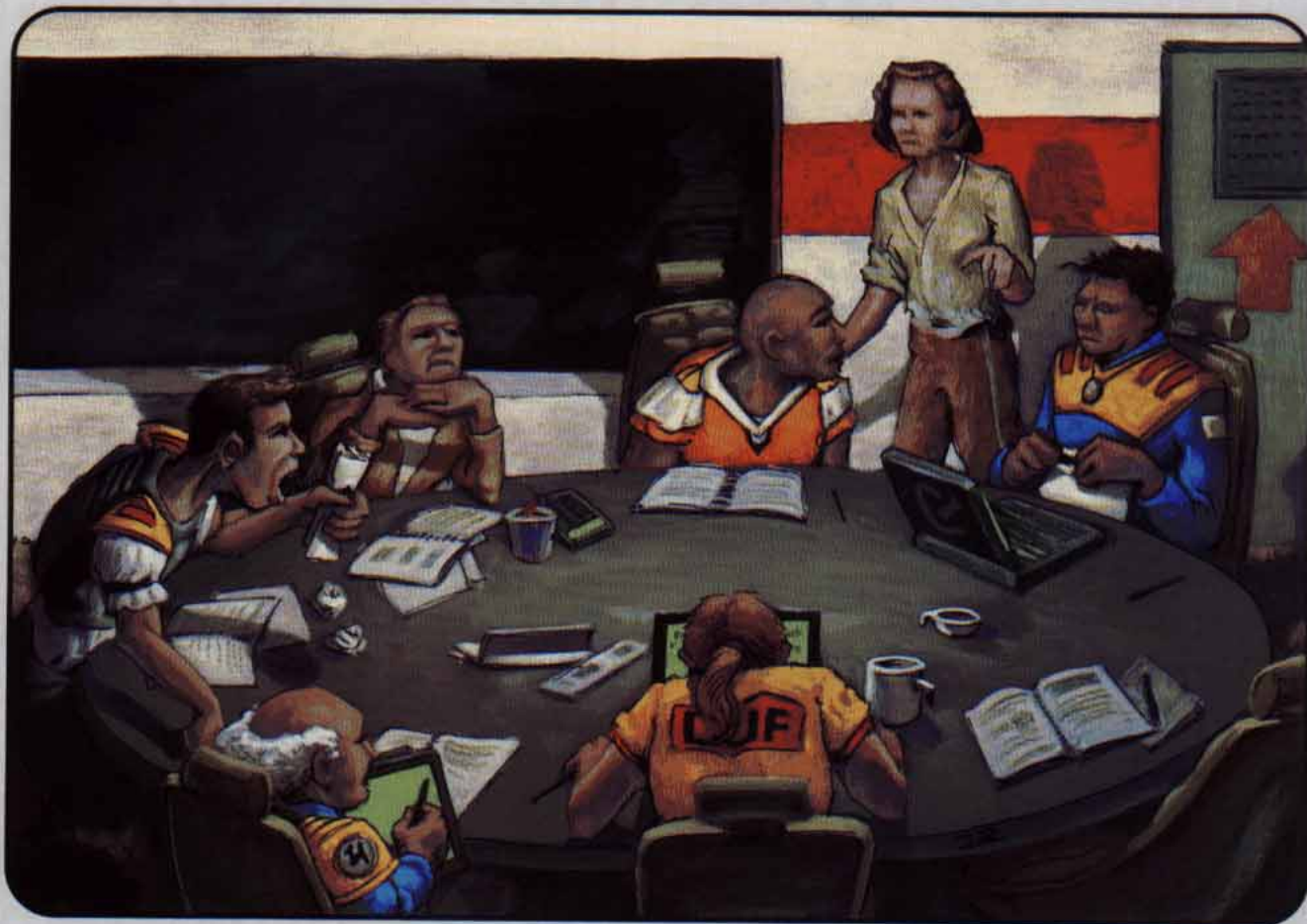
When the progressive and urbanizing people of Ferrand began to export their wildlife to other moons, the people of Lousanne made an exceptional sacrifice. Relocating many farms from the highlands, they abandoned one of their most fertile regions, proclaiming that Cembria would stand

now and forever as an wildlife preserve, as pure and unspoiled a place as could be had. For the Dreth who believed in purity and perfection of essence, the decision served the greater good and was thus a necessity.

No Dreth in the system could do anything but respect the decision, even if it meant higher prices for Lousanne grain. Today, a small but well-trained force of wardens patrols and watches over Cembria. Passage to the highlands is forbidden save to the monitors and a few scientists who watch over its animals and occasionally deliver additional animals to its confines. The monitors assume their duties with a great deal of gravity. In the last year, monitors captured three outsiders, Arrivers who sought excitement and decided to visit Cembria, and the Lousanne government sentenced them to three years of hard labor.

ARLES

Without the people of Arles, the problems of the Dreth Commonwealth would triple in intensity. Without them, the Dewi star system might be listed as simply another lost and independent colony. Without them, the stellar nations would own half of the Dewi system. And it's not because of anything innate to the moon, twin of Lousanne in size and climate. (If anything, Arles' desert surface invites a question of its significance.) It is because of what Dreth men and



women have built there in their city of Isette.

Light-years away, the once-Dreth planet of Isette continues to orbit its star, heedless that its people are dead and gone, that its crust has lain dormant since its breaking. One of the first worlds to experience the treachery of VoidCorp, Isette was once home to one of the strongest manufacturing communities in Old Space, supplying miniaturized electronic hardware and capacitors throughout the Stellar Ring. A VoidCorp task force eradicated the planet's defenses; without the time to occupy and seize the planet's assets, the fleet commander gave the order to reduce Isette's cities to rubble.

The manufacturing capacity of Arles is not much more than 1% of what Isette once knew. Yet that still draws the attention of Vergers and Arrivers alike. Arles is a manufacturing center that rivals all but the largest in the Verge. And Arles produces high-quality, state-of-the-art tech equipment rarely found outside the Stellar Ring.

Politically, the denizens of Arles have never demonstrated the reliability that their manufactured goods are known for. In the spectrum of political thought in the Dewi system, Will Eakin (Hm/Dreth/DFA-6) and his cabinet can only be described as moderate—not out of any sense of deliberation between the needs of federalist and antifederalist powers, but out of a true sense of unpredictability. Eakin is the most likely of any of the moon-states' prime ministers to change his mind, alter policy, and shift sides during debate. Simply put, most of the population pursues advancement of knowledge and technology, not group sociology or politics. They're more likely to be swayed by a reasonable argument or convinced of a new direction for the Dreth Commonwealth.

CARIDWEN

Caridwen stands as the second gas giant in the system around which habitable moons orbit. Less than half the size of its neighbor Amaethon, it's often overlooked by Arrivers and even other Vergers who hold that the center of culture in the Dewi system is on Ferrand and to a lesser extent the rest of the nearby moons. Caridwen receives less publicity, but that's something of a conscious choice by the people who live here.

The planet itself is unexceptional, dominated by hydrogen, helium, and a concentration of noble gases. No significant mining operation or cloud-based construction has ever begun within Caridwen.

CARIDWEN'S MINOR MOONS

Ten moons orbit Caridwen, in addition to scores of additional smaller rocks and asteroids that the gas giant has permanently captured. Most of the moons are host to nothing more than dust, rock, ice, and vacuum, with a few exceptions.

Cuchain, Caridwen's tenth moon, is a Class 3 world (G1/R3/A3/P2/H1) with an irregular orbital path. Too cold and generally inhospitable for the Dreth who have better options open to them, Cuchain has never been settled. Even

the rejects, cast-outs, and criminals of the Commonwealth have the option of finding a quiet corner of the underpopulated moons to live on. Other large unpopulated moons include Tavistock, the third moon, Falmouth, the fifth, and Torquay, the sixth.

BODMIN

Bodmin. Archilla. For the Dreth, the very names are synonymous with the heritage of the Dreth Commonwealth. Archilla was the second world claimed by the old Commonwealth, centuries ago. It's now the capital city of Bodmin, Caridwen's first moon. Moreover, while Adalcus may have represented the political center, Archilla held its spirit. The essayist and political theorist Greg Archilla made his home there, and it was his memories of a tyrannical Earth that gave Dreth their well-known distaste for centralized government. Of course, it was the same Archilla who also distilled the Dreth spirit of ascendance into a series of books that helped make the Dreth what they are.

While the Dreth quest and rejection of authority were visionary when they first spread through the Commonwealth, their tenets find more acceptance today and so are considered traditional, even conventional. As Kanar might say, all societies must grow in change. The very notion is essential to the quest for excellence.

Meanwhile, the small but respected population of Bodmin stands against even the smallest violations of Dreth custom. It was to this moon-state that many former ministers and government leaders of the old Dreth Commonwealth came after the fall of Adalcus. And even while those leaders wrapped themselves in mourning and never made an effort to seize political initiative in the Dewi system, their very presence on Bodmin has called into question the leadership role of Ferrand. Pursuits of both scholastics and physical nature found natural homes on Bodmin, where the best schools and academies rose in the 25th century.

Bodmin itself is a small moon sharing most characteristics with Lauceston and Torpoint. Since it's slightly cooler than most humans and other hero species might prefer, most of the population centers around the equator. Sealed environments, akin to those on Lorient and Ferrand, assure a steady supply of breathable air. Fauna on the moon has never been discovered, and even plant life is extremely primitive, limited to unsophisticated algae-like forms. Transplanted and engineered crops haven't performed well in Bodmin's soil, and most foodstuffs are either imported from Lousanne or grown in greenhouse arcologies.

A POLITICAL DISPUTE

From the earliest days of the New Dreth Commonwealth, Bodmin and Ferrand have stood at opposite ends of a spectrum. Ferrand was generally considered politically moderate by the other moon-states, but even this relaxation of Dreth separatist ideals drew criticism from Bodmin's lead-

ADVENTURE HOOK: AT THE BEHEST OF THE NEW DRETH COMMONWEALTH

Despite the best hopes and dreams of many Dreth, their coalition government still has trouble rallying behind all but a few issues. One of the passions they do share, though, involves harassing, antagonizing, humiliating, or in any way opposing the interests of the interstellar giant VoidCorp. Yet few have accused the Dreth of outright stupidity; even as they want VoidCorp to know who has hurt it, they need to protect their assets and their *modus operandi*. So the Dreth are clever enough to use blind operatives, freelance agents, and even criminals in their efforts. The heroes, likely unknowns, fit the bill. No one said that a quest for perfection didn't occasionally mean getting your hands dirty.

BACKGROUND

The heroes are contacted, either by a regular agent or through a mutual acquaintance. Thereafter, a prospective employer invites the heroes to a meeting that can occur in the Dewi system (in Chelt, for example) or even in some other star system. Introducing himself as Jeff Lakons, the human male claims to represent the October Corporation, a travel booking company that owns several shuttlecraft in the Verge. The October Corporation is owed several million dollars by the moon-state of Lousanne, and Lakons has a writ demanding that Bastone Apple appear before an independent Concord court on Bluefall. The heroes' talents are required as bounty hunters to deliver Apple, who has refused to answer the summons of a civil court. A shuttle will await them on the Torpoint spaceport to make a quick exit.

Layer of deceit are being used here. On the surface, Lakons' story stands up to some checking. He does work for the October Corporation, and the writ he possesses seems to be in order, as even Administrator Tiras could confirm. As delicately as possible, encourage the heroes to accept the mission.

The next stage of the adventure involves going to Lousanne and, essentially, kidnapping Prime Minister Apple. You can play up this segment as much as you desire, with advanced reconnaissance, political intrigue involving the moon-state's bureaucracy, and possibly even the presence of other moon-states. Ultimately, the heroes should find their mission challenging but not beyond their abilities.

With Apple in tow, the heroes return, as planned, to their shuttle waiting to take them and their charge to Bluefall. There, waiting for them, is a group of more than a dozen Dreth soldiers. The heroes are arrested

and charged with kidnapping. After a few hours or even days in holding with only some short questioning sessions, the heroes are told another story. The writ they have is a fraud, and the Concord has no record of the civil court action against Lousanne or Bastone Apple. The Dreth offer a deal: Discover the real source of this job and testify against him, and the Dreth Commonwealth will drop the charge of kidnapping. Play up this offer as a typical little-fish-for-big-fish legal drama.

Now, the heroes must investigate their former employer, only to discover that Jeff Lakons and the October Corporation are both fictional entities. However, after some careful digging and talking to witnesses, the heroes can discover that the October Corporation is a holding of Transtate Industries, a known subsidiary of VoidCorp. Now everything seems explained, and the heroes can eventually identify the man they met as Jeff Lakons as none other than VoidCorp executive and deputy ambassador OP823 23KIK (Jeffrey Rogers). Then they can either go after OP823 or take their testimony and evidence to the Dreth and the Concord.

Either way, they've been duped again—or rather, from the start. The man the heroes met at the start of the adventure wasn't really OP823, but a Dreth impersonator. The whole adventure hopes to frame OP823 and VoidCorp, and the use of the heroes minimized risk of discovery and increases their believability as witnesses.

SUPPORTING CAST

For this adventure, you'll need to create statistics for Bastone Apple, OP823 23KIK, and, most importantly a dozen or so personal guards (Combat Specs) for the former. OP823 23KIK is a Diplomat (Free Agent).

Remember, the Dreth won't be putting up a hard-fought resistance during the initial stage of the adventure. They want the heroes to succeed in kidnapping Apple, and their security forces may either be in on the conspiracy or distracted from orders on high during their watch. Apple himself will play the role of wounded and lost while the characters have him.

As for OP823, his surprise at the heroes' accusations is not feigned. To be clear, he's probably been involved in operations and crimes that merit this treatment, but for once he's innocent of the charges. It will be up to the heroes to discover this and then decide what to do with him.

ers. Today, as Ferrand has grown more and more willing to embrace a single powerful ruling government, the rift has grown. Daphne Rice (Hf/Dreth/TO-6) and Brian Corella rarely agree on issues, and the two have had heated public exchanges. For Corella, it may be entirely an issue of ambition and the primacy of Ferrand; if the politics of the Dreth ever truly leaned fully back toward the old Dreth Commonwealth, Bodmin would naturally eclipse Ferrand.

For Rice, such a goal doesn't represent an appetite for power, but the chance for a Dreth cultural reinvestiture. But even she can't close the doors to the star system and the frequent influx of immigrants and new ideas. Nor would she truly want to. But for her, the oft-argued need for unification only masquerades as a means to sabotage the possibility of a vibrant Dreth Commonwealth. In truth, Rice believes that ceding additional rights to a new government will only lead to corruption and intellectual dishonesty.

LAUCESTON

Lauceston, by all rights, should have attracted just as much attention and colonization as any of the six other moon-states. Settled in the midst of the decade of revolt, Lauceston netted the fewest number of Dreth colonists, with only a few thousand choosing to cloister themselves in the moon's light atmosphere and gravity. Today, the trend has

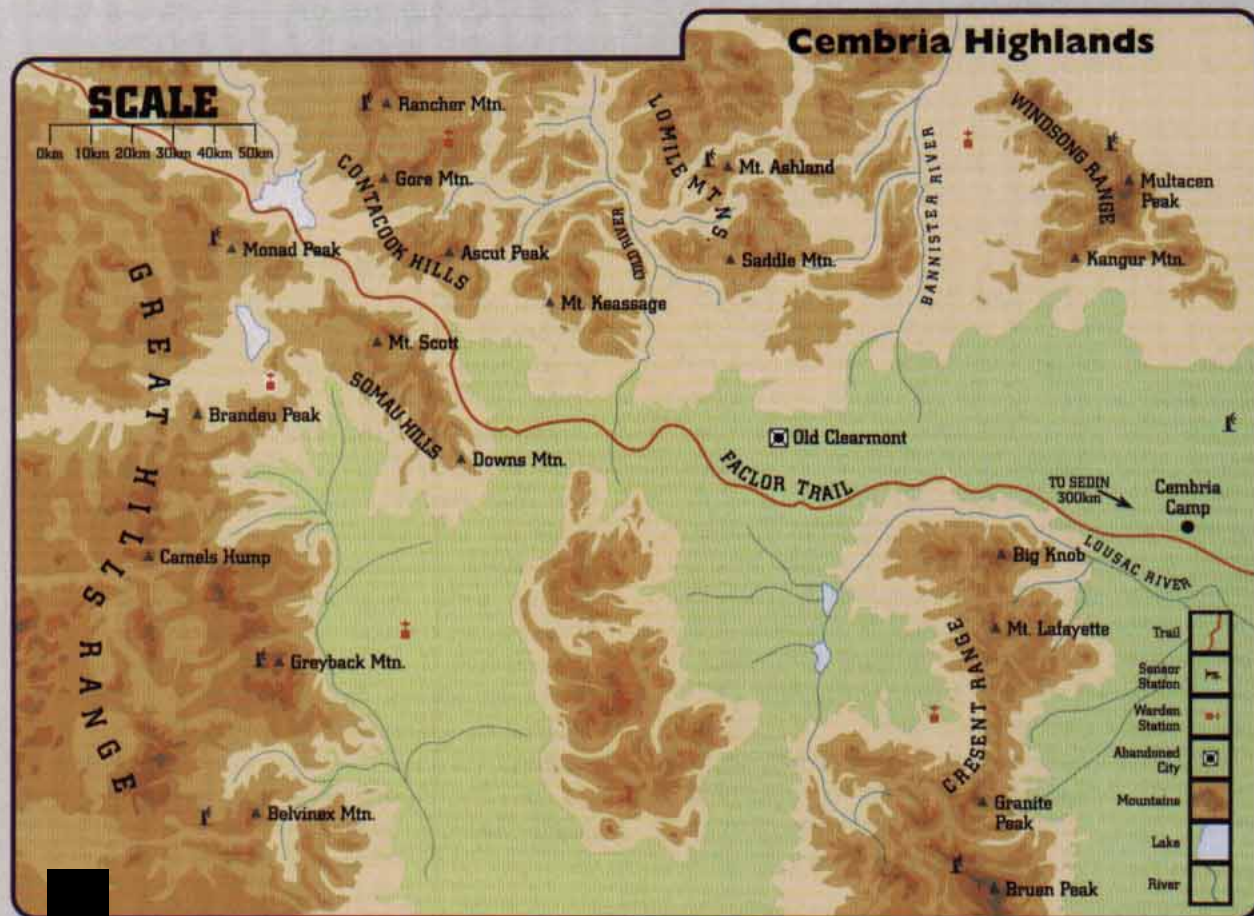
continued, and at 68,000, Lauceston has nothing more than a single city, Tilburn, to hold its population.

Legally, Lauceston has equal power and voting authority within the Commonwealth Council. In reality, Annette Mayeski (Hf/Dreth/FA-6), a former journalist who did correspondence work on all seven of the moon-states, warms her bench in most of the monthly conferences without saying more than a word. The attention of the Dreth Commonwealth seldom turns to Lauceston, and that suits most inhabitants of Lauceston just fine.

Politically, the colony follows its neighbor Bodmin in most things. The small population is only known for a inclination for matters martial; once upon a time, the old Dreth Commonwealth planet Tilburn hosted more than a dozen military youth academies. One of the reasons that Lauceston has never grown is that its children often take service with the Dreth Commonwealth's small navy, and even after years of peace, they seldom return to their former homes, choosing a life in the stars or on another moon.

TORPOINT

The fourth moon of Caedmon casts its eyes outward, forever gazing into the distant corners of the star system and beyond. Astronomically, Torpoint's status as the furthestmost settled world is relatively insignificant; only a few million



kilometers separate Torpoint and Lauceston, and indeed a journey of only a couple of hours separates Torpoint and Ferrand during a conjunction. Psychologically and politically, however, Torpoint's status as Dewi system's vanguard has rarely been open to question.

The Dreth Commonwealth's sole starport, a starport capable of capital ship repairs, orbits Torpoint. So it's not a surprise that military and naval commanders cultivate friendships with the government of Torpoint, even if their private loyalties attach them to another moon-state (see "Commonwealth Defenses" below).

The people of Torpoint, once inhabitants of a distant Dreth colony named Afterglow, have experienced the greatest development and change of all of the Dreth populations. The people of the original Afterglow were known for quiet introspection, not unlike the people of Bodmin. In the last century, the people living in the city of Afterglow and its starport have become more extroverted and more interested in the political climate of the galaxy around them. Most Dreth attribute the change to an affliction that has struck all Commonwealth society to some extent: the abandonment of the quest for a more viable interstellar society in which the Dreth can live alongside people of various stellar nations. Instead, the Dreth of Torpoint have grown more interested in a purely Dreth-based relationship with nearby systems. Over the years, it has always been the people of Torpoint who have agitated for the expansion of space under Commonwealth sovereignty.

COLONIZATION

The Commonwealth shows no signs of outgrowing its home in the Dewi system, but Alita Spinner (Hi/Dreth/DTO-6) has pushed for numerous colonization attempts in nearby star systems. The cost of serious efforts to expand makes the moon-states leery, and there's always the question of how to administer the new colony: Will a single moon-state rule the colony, or will the Council have sway? Will additional colonies expand the recognized moon-states beyond the cur-

rent seven? Until recently, the possibility of compromise on this issue was low; of late, it's more likely. Currently, the Dreth Commonwealth supports colonies in the Tarsis and the Gilex systems, with plans to expand its sphere of influence.

In some sense, the desire to expand emerges from a competitive spirit. The Dreth quest for perfection didn't fail to consider the inspiring nature of rivalries between people, settlements, and nations. Since most of the most powerful nations of the Verge—the Regency of Bluefall, the Common Council of Alaundril, the United Lison State, and others—demonstrate their power through expansion, so must the Dreth Commonwealth follow their example if it wants to be taken seriously as a power in the region.

The people of Torpoint have been at the forefront of these new colonization attempts. The *Liquid*, one of the Dreth cruisers that has historically given loyalty to Spinner and Torpoint, is the only cruiser to leave the Dewi star system on regular patrols of nearby star systems. For months at a time, the *Liquid* disappears to watch over settlements that would otherwise be largely undefended against the advances of criminals or unscrupulous Arrivers seeking to control a system of their own.

THE AFTERGLOW SUPERPORT

Most of the traffic into and out of the Dewi system comes through the Afterglow starport. The Dreth encourage visitors and merchants arriving in their space to stop at the port to register their vessel's presence and clear customs. Each moon-state has a small staff aboard the port and has the authority here to offer visas and passes to points in the system. All the typical conveniences of a tourist center, Concord chancery, and customs center are onboard.

GWYDION

A common medium-sized gas giant, Gwydion possesses a gas cloud of hydrogen and helium in its outer layers, water and ammonia in its inner layers, and at its depths a molten

TABLE 4: CARIDWEN'S MAJOR MOONS

	Bodmin	Lauceston	Torpoint
Primary	Caridwen	Caridwen	Caridwen
Planetary Class	Class 2	Class 2	Class 2
Gravity	G1 (0.73 g)	G1 (.8 g)	G2 (0.96 g)
Radiation	H2 (16 rem/wk)	H2 (13 rem/wk)	H3 (19 rem/day)
Atmosphere	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)
Pressure	P1 (0.4 atm)	P2 (.72 atm)	P1 (0.31 atm)
Heat	H2 (18° C)	H2 (16° C)	H2 (-5° C)
Orbital Distance	0.24 AU	0.37 AU	0.74 AU
Diameter	6,270 km	7,035 km	7,380 km
Year	42.8 days	83.2 days	116 days
Day	32.1 hours	3.4 days	15.5 hours
Axial Tilt	13.9°	22.4°	4.3°
Density	1.07	1.18	0.97
# Satellites	0	0	0

CAPACITORS MATTER?

A few of the more careless soldiers and mercenaries of the Verge mocked the sudden interest in the technology that rolled out of Dreth assembly lines. "After all," quoting one Thuldan legionnaire, "can a more developed rifle do more damage or shoot farther?" The answer is no. But improved weapons do promise longevity and reliability. Dreth capacitors increase the clip size of any energy weapon (personal, ranged, or heavy) by 100%. For example, a render rifle powered by a Dreth lanthanide capacitor can fire sixteen shots before discharging, instead of the normal eight. In combat, that can mean the difference between running empty or shooting the enemy. If nothing else, it saves the effort of frequent reloading.

Similarly, a Dreth accumulator (1 durability point system) aboard a starship can retain a charge of 20 power factors instead of the normal 10. Unfortunately, few Dreth shipyards still stand. A small, privately held shipyard on Arles builds a few scouts and traders every year, but mostly does just repairs. Of late, demands for Dreth tech have led its owner to build a few dozen capacitors every year for off-planet construction, but the design plans and engineering techniques remain a Dreth secret.

As for reliability, Dreth capacitors are much less likely to fail. If using the "Weapon Failures" rule (see Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action in the *Gamemaster Guide*), ignore any result of "Jammed" or "Out of ammo" for a firearm powered by a Dreth lanth cell. Similarly, in ship combat, if a system failure targets a Dreth accumulator, allow the compartment to make a second durability check; with a success, the system failure is ignored.

High demand and the diminished number of Dreth manufacturers have raised the price of Dreth technology. Multiply the clip cost (or accumulator system cost) by five times.

rocky core. With its light composition, the upper cloudtops have neither a crushing gravity nor a high density. Long ago, such cloud layers were a popular place for criminals and pirates to hide. The strength of a skilled Dreth navy, today augmented by occasional Concord presence, has made Gwydion considerably less appealing as a hiding place.

DYLAN

Sometime in the last thousand years, Dylan suffered an interesting cosmic event—a collision with a major asteroid, comet, or even one its minor moons. Since then, the planet has been surrounded by a cloud of dust and ice that is slowly coalescing into a ring system. In another few hundred years, Dylan will possess rings as developed as Saturn's or even famous Callin's (in the Borealis Republic's Agraine system). Then, Dylan may be a fashionable tourist stop or image for poster producers everywhere. For now, Dylan remains undeveloped.

BRAN

The fifth of five gas giants in the system, Bran barely makes the grade. It stands just on one side of a critical gravity, barely able to retain a hydrogen atmosphere. Fortunately for Bran, the solar wind is considerably weaker out in the distant reaches of the solar system, allowing the smallest of Dewi's gas giants to preserve its status.

Of all the gas giants, Bran is the most likely to see mineral prospecting someday. Its relatively low ratio of common gases (hydrogen and helium) to rarer compounds makes it an attractive target for someone to develop.

ARIANRHOD

Arianrhod has little to recommend it. Collected from cosmic dust much like the other planets in the system, the small world never had sufficient gravity to attract much of atmosphere, not even the comparatively thin ones around typical Class 1 worlds.

Whatever matter might have become an atmosphere instead lies in a thin layer of water and methane ice on the rocky planet's surface. This, and the dust the moon has collected, form a layer several meters deep, covering much of the planet.

PWYLL

The reason why the Dreth Commonwealth leases rights to Pwyll, of all places, to the Thuldan Empire seems clear. The most constant of the old Dreth Commonwealth's allies, the Thuldans maintain strong ties to its successor state. Moreover, with all the generosity that the Thuldan Empire has shown to the Commonwealth, the Dreth Council could hardly refuse the request of a Thuldan ambassador to rent the use of Pwyll—at a contract rate of several trillion Concord dollars over the ten-year span of the lease.

In February the Thuldans began constructing a superport, capable of refitting and repairing capital ships, at Pwyll. To allay any fears, Dreth inspectors and observers will have a permanent station at the Pwyll starport, able to watch and report on the comings and going of Thuldan military and nonmilitary craft.

Some outsiders speculate that the Thuldans may well leave the Dreth as they are—friendly allies—and move beyond this edge of what's generally considered the Verge to expand in a new direction. If that is true, a starport here in the Dewi star system could be an advantageous tool for the Thuldans to embark upon their exploration. It would

also represent a significant change in standard Imperial political doctrine, which for years has focused on extending its control of the Stellar Ring and the core of humanity, rather than expanding its borders through natural growth.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In the complexities of Dreth politics, relations with the stellar nations and other foreign powers are far easier to understand than the chaotic state of affairs internally. Thanks to the independence proclamation of 2497, the Dewi system has remained wholly free of foreign fleets, foreign troops, and even friendly "advisors" from the Stellar Ring. It cannot, though, completely remove itself from their interests.

Trade, for one thing, has made the stellar nations interested in dealing with the system. With seven habitable worlds present and several million inhabitants, the manufacturing base represented here cannot be ignored. It's minute when compared to any first or even second world of Old Space, but here on the frontier Dewi is one of the top ten manufacturing centers.

Moreover, with the collapse of the old Dreth Commonwealth, many of its best technologies and scientific advances were lost, captured or destroyed in a scorched-earth policy before they could be acquired by the Commonwealth's conquerors. Dreth superconductor technology and its offshoot of lanthanide capacitor tech have kept their edge over the years and even today outperform the best that StarMech or any other nation's industries have to offer.

ALONE IN THE DARK

The Dewi star system is one of the many systems in the Verge that does not as yet possess a drivespace communications relay station. Communications to and from the system rely on infotradings starships to carry all forms of data: personal messages, business communiques, financial reports, news, and entertainment. Only in the rare instances—at most, once or twice in a given year—when the *Lighthouse* happens by does the system have full and almost immediate access to the interstellar Grid.

Almost all of the data traffic to the Dewi system comes from the Aegis system's drivesat and Grid. Given the dilapidated condition of networks there, the situation for the Dewi system is even worse by comparison.

The Dewi system, like many others, has appealed to the Galactic Concord to construct a drivespace communications relay in the Dewi star system. Even while claiming their own independence, Dreth ambassadors use an argument common to Vergers when speaking with the Concordans, citing the Concord interest in preserving peace and promoting commerce and safety within a region that is essentially a Concord protectorate. In addition, the Dreth appeal to the Inseers, builders of drivesats in their own right, and the Thuldans, who demonstrate so much philanthropy here.

Unfortunately for the inhabitants of the Dewi system (as well as most other systems in the Verge), drivesat installations are exceptionally expensive. Spread over the length of human-explored space, Concord resources can't tackle the problem here. Too much effort goes into rebuilding and maintaining the stations of the Stellar Ring after the ravages of the Second Galactic War. Of late, it seems more likely that drivesats may arrive in the Verge through the benevolence of VoidCorp, which has offered to deliver drivesats to Corrivale, Oberon, and Algemron. But it's unlikely a VoidCorp drivesat will be seen here anytime soon.

A grant from the Insight government seems more likely. Many Dreth live in Insight space, and they actively aid that nation in opposing the further expansion of VoidCorp influence. Negotiations continue with Insight representatives, but have recently reached the stage of "when" rather than "if." By all estimates, the two parties will agree on a delivery date sometime in late 2503 or early 2504. As for the Thuldans, the progress of Inseer negotiations has made the issue moot; still, the Empire's delegation to the Commonwealth has made no secret that it would be willing to finance a drivesat here should the bargaining with Insight fail.

THE GALACTIC CONCORD

As the Concord has essentially defined the nature of international relations in the Dewi system, it has also forged a presence to encourage nonconfrontational growth and exchange. An embassy has been opened on Ferrand, the fourth moon of Amaethon, cementing its growing stature as the capital and leader of the seven colonies. For Brian Corella, the placement of the embassy demonstrates that the rest of the galaxy considers him the de facto leader of the New Dreth Commonwealth. Inasmuch as the rest of the galaxy cares, his presumption may be correct.

Even so, a small Concord artificial environment has been completed on barren and airless Cherbourg, the second moon of Amaethon. This follows what seems to be a regular trend of the Concord to establish a small foothold in every Verge system, whether on a planet, moon, or orbiting station. As in the rest of the Verge, the Concord station here is autonomous and at a mild distance from the well-populated colonies.

The Concord flag flies on only a few vessels in the system, and these are mostly couriers and transports. Most of the time, the strongest Concord military presence in the system is a scout or an escort-class vessel, and even these stay only long enough to recharge their stardrives and continue on with their interstellar patrols. With four old but still powerful Dreth cruisers keeping the peace in the Dewi system, there is little that the Concord could afford to add that would much improve the station's systems. And most Dreth prefer it that way. After all, the last ally they trusted now owns most of Dreth space.

Yet while the Star Force proper has little commitment in the Dreth's star system, one of its agencies isn't so uninterested. The Concord Survey Service opened an office on Ferrand

only a few months after the independence proclamation. Staffed by several dozen bureaucrats, this CSS outpost has grown into one of the largest of its kind in the Verge. From here, numerous survey missions begin, some by employed Concordans, but most of them chartered activities of Vergers.

Of the two ranking officials in the system, Ambassador Tomakis has fewer responsibilities. With his own proclamation recognizing the New Dreth Commonwealth, issues of sovereignty have been settled, and most of the stellar nations have sought other available territory to bargain over. Tomakis even leaves most of the interactions with the Dreth to Tiras.

Another task for Administrator Tiras is to ensure the safety of all visitors to the Dewi system, Arriver or Verger. The Concord is the natural agency for travelers to seek refuge or aid in the event of a dispute. The most difficult case to date involved the extradition of a VoidCorp Employee who had the temerity to leave himself vulnerable to Dreth citizens and their government.

STELLAR NATIONS

With any chance of really moving in stalled by the Concord and public opinion, representatives of the stellar nations have had to adopt a different tactic as they hope to exploit the Dewi system and its inhabitants. Indeed, most Arrivers in the system represent small independent corporations from the Stellar Ring, going about the business of trading commodities to and from the Dreth in the system. Even the official representatives of foreign states seem more interested in interacting with the Dreth economy rather than staking any claims of sovereignty.

Other factors beyond the economic one make this star system interesting to stellar nations. Cast off on one uncrowded edge of the Verge, Dewi is a likely launching point for future exploration and colonization—a characteristic more often associated with the Hammer's Star system. Of course, that's why the CSS has settled here.

Thanks to the Galactic Concord's intervention, there has been relatively little organized activity on the part of stellar nations in the Dewi system. Plus, as Dreth representatives address foreign ministers and delegates, they are quick to demand recognition as representatives of the New Dreth Commonwealth, and to demand the recognition of any previously negotiated agreements. Dreth success in this regard can only be described as mixed. As tolerant as the stellar nations have been to the tiny republic, most haven't been eager to indulge in renewed promises of support, mutual defense, and trade guarantees. If for no other reason, the delegates of the Stellar Ring are loath to demonstrate too much favor to the Dreth since it could create similar expectations in other Verge colonies and governments.

Thus, the stellar nations have chosen a friendly, helpful policy with this New Dreth Commonwealth, while still denying any official responsibility or obligation. With aid packages, development programs, and favorable economic agreements, stellar nations as varied as the Orion League,

the Nariac Domain, and the Hatire Community gain the respect of the Dreth and some small interstellar goodwill and political capital in the Verge.

In this unusual state of amity, one predictable exception lies in VoidCorp. Of course, some of the benevolence for the Dreth today is maintained not only by admiration for what they used to represent, but also their defiance in the face of mighty VoidCorp. No attempt at reconciliation has been made either by the Dreth or the stellar nation that betrayed them a century ago. As Dreth continue to harass VoidCorp and their interests in Insight space and everywhere, VoidCorp executives view the Dreth as pests. When possible, VoidCorp agents throughout the Stellar Ring and beyond have arrested Dreth as criminals and terrorists. But reduced to its current state, the Dreth government has drawn no real interest from executives on Catalog or anywhere else. Apparently, VoidCorp believes that the Dreth are no longer worthy of its attention.

THE THULDAN EMPIRE

The widespread, if mild, benevolence toward the Dreth is also broken by the Thuldan Empire—but not in a way that many of the Thuldan's pessimistic critics might expect. Breaking from their wartime ally VoidCorp, representatives of the Emperor have extended every courtesy to the New Dreth Commonwealth, including full recognition of their alliance, as given in the Compact of Expansion. Dreth citizens have been extended full freedom to travel to and within the Empire—at least as much freedom exists within its highly structured space. The Empire has renewed its pledge to defend the Commonwealth should it come under attack, and expressed heartfelt regrets over the events of the Second Galactic War. A Thuldan minister has even proposed before the Galactic Consulate that the New Dreth Commonwealth become a stellar nation; so far, the proposal has little chance of acceptance.

Meanwhile, the Empire has donated billions of dollars to the colonies of the Dewi star system, helping to finance repairs of the small Dreth fleet and the construction of advanced manufacturing facilities and orbital defenses currently underway.

In return, the Thuldan Empire has asked for little. Thuldan military vessels within the Dewi system, under agreement with the Dreth government, are kept to a bare minimum. To dispel any sense of concern among the local populace, their presence here tends to be short. The Thuldans have no territorial rights within the system, having asked for none. Barren little Pwyll, a sterile but sizeable rock on the outer edges of the system, has been licensed to the Imperials to do with as they please.

Just what policy the Thuldans hope to play out in the Dewi system has yet to become clear. Their detractors, exemplified within the Dreth Commonwealth by Alita Spinner and uncountable others from outside the system's edge, claim that it is only a matter of time before the cost of these Imperial gifts comes home.

LODIRI BA TIRAS **SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR**

Level 15 fraal Mindwalker

STR 8	(0)	INT 14	(+2)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 12	(+1)
CON 9		PER 10	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 13+/12/6/3

Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 1

Psionic energy points: 18

Attacks

Unarmed Attack 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/0

Mind blast 12/6/3 d4+1s/d4+2s/d6+2s En/0

Pyrokinetics 15/7/3 d4+2w/d6+2w/d8+2w En/0

9mm ch pistol 10/5/2 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m HI/0

Tri-staff 10/5/2 d8+2w/3d4+1w/d6m En/0

Defenses

Deflection harness, tri-staff (+3 STR, DEX resistance modifiers when both are activated)

Skills

Melee Weapons [8]—*powered* [10]; Modern [9]—*pistol* [10]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Knowledge [14]—*computer* [15]; *language: Standard* [17]; Law [14]—*court procedures* [15]; *law enforcement* [16]; Administration [12]—*bureaucracy* [13]; *management* [14]; Awareness [12]—*intuition* [13]; *perception* [13]; Resolve [12]—*mental* [13]; Interaction [10]—*bargain* [12]; *charm* [12]; Leadership [10]—*command* [11]; ESP [14]—*mind reading* [17]; *precognition* [21]; *sensitivity* [15]; Telekinesis [12]—*pyrokinetics* [15]; Telepathy [10]—*contact* [12]; *mind blast* [12]; *mind shield* [14].

By all rights, Tiras should be one of the highest-ranked and most respected Administrators within the Verge. She has the gifts, in addition to her formidable psionic arsenal. She commands an entire star system's legal authority. But like many of her career operating in far-flung systems of the Verge, Tiras has few resources at her call. Only three Field Administrators are in the system as her lieutenants.

Ironically, the mystery that caused many to wonder why Tiras championed Dreth independence here goes unsolved even in her own heart. Four years ago, Tiras experienced one of the most intense precognitive episodes of her life. She's still grappling with its meaning, but she can remember the image of four Dreth cruisers, alone but triumphant against a terrible foe.

When she's not encumbered by waking dreams and her frequent visions, Tiras is a personable, outgoing individual. She's easy to work with, and she has become a favorite confidant of Dreth with problems.



VERGE GOVERNMENTS

Distant as it is from any of the most powerful and populated Verge systems and home to an exceptional special interest, the Dewi system has never been strongly influenced by another of the Verge governments. Business and trade with Aegis, Algernon, and even more distant Tendril have been stable for decades. At the same time, relations between Dewi and most of the systems have never been particularly warm.

Why have the Dreth and other Vergers had such a difficult time getting along? In the early days complications from competing interests of stellar nations kept many of the individual colonial systems from cooperating much. But when that period came to an end during the Long Silence, the Dewi system became the official home of a stellar nation—granted, a defeated one—made its appearance.

Couple that anger and jealousy with fears of Dreth expansion through the Verge, and the political blunder in 2498 of Will Eakin—who refused to send delegates to a meeting called by the Verge Confederation in response to the destruction of Hammer's Star—and the continued coolness between Dewi and the rest of the Verge is explained.

COMMONWEALTH DEFENSES

The other disadvantage that the remote systems of the Verge suffer under is the need for organized defensive armaments and strategies. Dewi is no exception to this

rule, and its special status among many of the stellar nations does not render it immune to independent or rogue attacks. More recently, the return to the Verge of nationalized stellar nation assets—especially those of VoidCorp—and the continued aggression in Hammer's Star and elsewhere of several external species apparently native to the region have increased the need for defense in the Dewi star system.

The Dewi star system qualifies as one of the few star systems to merit a Type Four defensive rating (see Chapter 4: The Verge in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting). As has been the case for decades, the backbone of the colonies' might is represented by four military cruisers, relics of the first half of the Second Galactic War. The *Liquid*, the oldest, patrols Torpoint. The *Crash Villain*, a battle-scarred veteran currently being refitted on Torpoint, typically follows the commands of Mark Sasso of Lorient. Meanwhile both the *Angelwing* and the *Bitter Pill* show fealty to Ferrand. As for an army, the Dreth boast only a small defense force numbering some two thousand men and women, most of whom double as constables and peace officers.

The cruisers also play a major role in the internal politics of the Dreth moon-states. While they've never been used in actual military actions, the fact that each of the cruisers owes allegiance to one of the Dreth moon-states presents the opportunity for occasional saber-rattling and opportunistic exploits into near space. Corella, for example, has taken to chauffeuring the other prime ministers about the moon-states in his cruisers.

THE SESHEYAN ISSUE

The last official census, taken in 2499, recorded the presence of just over 300,000 sesheyans living in the New Dreth Commonwealth, making the Dewi system home to the third-largest sesheyman population in the Verge, after the sanctuary of Corrivale and cosmopolitan Aegis. And that's just the official tally; it's a big system, and thousands more could be hiding on one of the seven colonies, or elsewhere. The reasons for sesheyman settlement in the Dewi system seem clear: Since the Dreth revile VoidCorp at every opportunity, they're unlikely to extradite sesheyans to VoidCorp. History has proven this belief to be correct; in fact, the Dreth seem to take some delight in bringing a few sesheyans, citizens of the New Dreth Commonwealth, to every diplomatic and trade conference that they attend—especially those gatherings a VoidCorp representative is likely to attend.

VoidCorp, in turn, has registered a protest with the Galactic Concord even as it refuses to acknowledge or speak with the government of the Dreth Commonwealth. Its executives don't want publicity of the situation in the Dewi system, already growing, to create a second Grith situation; after all, there's even more available room for settlement in the Dewi system than in Corrivale. Dreth officials, meanwhile, point to a treaty allowing exchange of scientific, military, and cultural advisors between the Commonwealth and VoidCorp. VoidCorp and the Dreth Commonwealth signed the agreement soon after the Expansion Compact; the New Dreth Commonwealth holds it still to be in effect, and so they've endorsed all sesheyans in the Dewi system, affording them status of ministers of culture from the state of VoidCorp. The tactic is not without some comedic value as even infant sesheyans are greeted as "Honorable Minister of 14th-Century Precontact Sesheyman Musical Composition" and the like. The Galactic Concord apparently hasn't found time to rule on the issue in the last three years, leading many to believe that it may never deal directly with the assertions of an irate VoidCorp.

ADVENTURE HOOK: THE SESHEYAN RAILROAD

As noted in the sidebar "The Sesheyan Issue," another way that the Dreth cast gleeful spite at VoidCorp is by granting citizenship to hundreds, even thousands, of sesheyans. VoidCorp has grown tired of being baited by the noisome little Dreth state, and has decided to take steps to remedy the situation by rendering the underground "Sesheyan Railroad" too perilous to traverse.

Just over a year ago, three sesheyans came to Lousanne as a part of this selfsame Railroad, seeking refuge after having managed to escape from VoidCorp-controlled space. As is the case with many such rescued refugees, these three survivors volunteered to assist their still-enslaved kindred. In the months since, the three brothers rose in the freedom organization, gaining the respect of their peers through their repeated successes at navigating past VoidCorp patrols and commissioning ships that can ferry sesheyan fugitives.

Now privy to the details of the Railroad program, its protocols, and its endorsement by the Dreth government, the VoidCorp sesheyan agents are in position to strike.

BACKGROUND

Through either a prior connection to the Dreth government (see "At the Behest . . ." above), a mutual sesheyan interest, or outright freelance, the heroes are asked to perform a potentially dangerous mission: Guard a cargoload of one hundred sesheyans on their way from Tendril to Dewi. Unbeknownst to the heroes, VoidCorp has full knowledge of the mission and its schedule. In accordance with corporate memos, the outlaw sesheyans will be eliminated, along with anyone who gets in the way.

Agents of the Railroad program provide the heroes with passage to Tendril, where they can get aboard the commercial liner *Tomorrow's Flower*, a large freighter designed to haul passengers instead of cargo. The liner takes them across the Verge to Dewi, making several stops along the way (with possible side adventures as the Gamemaster desires). The trip remains uneventful until the liner reaches Tarsis, the last stop on the way to Dewi.

There, a VoidCorp corvette, VCT DE46433 (*Solarstorm*), awaits their arrival. The corvette's captain demands to dock with the *Flower* and inspect her crew; he's had reports of contraband smuggling. Heavily armed and armored, he'll rely on his weaponry to authorize this spot inspection.

The heroes can attempt a hopeless space battle or wait until the corvette docks and then engage a dozen or more VoidCorp commandos when they board (with the help of a few feisty sesheyans). Or, they can allow the corvette's assault crew to find the sesheyans and take them into custody for a trial on violation of corporate law and interstellar treaty. The heroes will be released if they don't resist, but taken into custody as conspirators otherwise. The VoidCorp agents want evidence more than bodies, and they'll eagerly search for signs to implicate the Dreth government directly.

Assuming the heroes survive, the adventure has only begun. After investigation, they should begin to wonder how VoidCorp knew to be in Tarsis just then. (You can run the heroes through a few similar scenarios over a few months to get the point across in a longer campaign.) Then the real digging begins. Who knew the schedule? Who could have contacted VoidCorp? What patterns resolve?

This adventure can be as complex or as easily resolved as the Gamemaster wishes it to be. Perhaps it takes months of work to uncover the duplicitous sesheyans who've remained loyal to VoidCorp. Or only a matter of days; the heroes could set up a number of "false runs," and based on which is intercepted and whom they told, they could narrow the suspects down to a short list.

When it's all over, the heroes should face the choice of bringing to justice the sesheyan agents, releasing them, or generating an excuse for violence. Once it's clear they've been discovered, the sesheyan traitors will surrender or flee—not fight.

SUPPORTING CAST

For this adventure, you'll need to create statistics for the three sesheyan double agents and a dozen or so VoidCorp goons, along with, perhaps, the crew of the VCT DE46433. Finally, the heroes may interact with a number of other Railroad enthusiasts and even supporters from the Dreth Commonwealth government.

For the sesheyans, you can use the base statistics presented in the Old Space chapter in the *Alien Compendium* accessory. Add a few ranks of Deception and Interaction skills, Modern Ranged Weapons—*pistol* and some charge pistols. For the VoidCorp assault team, use either the Ordinary or Good Soldier template, depending on your heroes' relative power, as listed in Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast in the *Gamemaster Guide*.

SYSTEM LOG

As the Dewi system and its inhabitants seek to reenter the scene of interstellar politics, the return of the stellar nations has acted as a catalyst. Every day, the Dreth see Arrivers who can claim to be part of something the Dreth once had, and still dream of.

NARIACS SEEK CADROS OUTPOST

Claiming an insufferable lack of opportunities for its citizens, the Nariac Domain made an official request of the Galactic Concord and the New Dreth Commonwealth to sign a decade-long lease for the use of the planet Cadros. While the request acknowledged the relative worthlessness of the planet, it is clear that the Nariacs are simply desperate for a place to call their own in this region.

The Dreth Commonwealth Council's reply was swift and direct: They immediately forbade the founding of any Nariac colony or government colony department in the confines of the Dewi star system or any system recognized as part of the New Dreth Commonwealth. "The puppets of VoidCorp shall have no dominion here," read the press release. Nariac diplomats expressed outrage at the accusation and the public means by which it was delivered. While not expecting much success, they plan to appeal once again to the Commonwealth, and to the Concord.

LIQUID TO DRETH COMMONWEALTH: "THE PHANTOM SHIPS ARE BACK"

Last week, interplanetary travelers heard an interesting call on a public radio frequency. A young man's voice came through, and in squeaky and excited registers pro-

claimed: "Afterglow, this is *Liquid*. The phantom ships are back. Please advise." It would seem that the message, intended for a small audience in the Commonwealth military, inadvertently reached a broadcast channel.

The Commonwealth Council, Afterglow Superport, and the officers of the *Liquid* put forth a simple explanation: Someone with a radio transmitter decided to play an illegal joke, and the government will investigate the improper use of public channels.

ADMINISTRATOR TIRAS NAUSEATED BY SESHEYAN CUISINE

While many Administrators have become known for the forthright and direct dealings with other cultures and species, the fraal, including Administrator Tiras, generally exercise a great deal of diplomatic etiquette. That wasn't the case at a Dreth state dinner earlier this week, thrown at the behest of several sesheyman ministers of culture who wished to express their thanks to the Commonwealth.

Soon after being served, Administrator Tiras became pale and rose to excuse herself, only moments before collapsing to the ground, hastily regurgitating the contents of sesheyman dining. It makes for spectacular viewing, especially given that it's one of very few holorecordings of a fraal, as a local news outlet put it, "tossing her cookies."

Tiras was taken to a nearby hospital and released later that evening in fine health. As for the sesheyman, they seemed sad, but not offended; Administrator Tiras already made the humorous suggestion that she hopes to try again, and this time avoid the biological fireworks.

THE TARSIS SYSTEM

Located about three light-years away, the Tarsis star system houses the most populous settlement of the New Dreth Commonwealth outside of Dewi. Like the other four small settlements set up by the Dreth (Thorn, Malova, Sobel, and Goddard), little attention is given to the Tarsis system. Arrivers mostly ignore the tiny systems until a resource of note or population of size can be found. Vergers have enough to concern themselves with, and since the Dreth Commonwealth's rate of growth has languished, concerns about the Dreth flag spreading over a significant area have diminished.

Some eight thousand sentients, mostly Dreth, live on the worlds that orbit Tarsis, an M4 star. Most of them dwell on Kliot (G3/R2/A2/P3/H1), a large, cool Class 2 world that's the best Tarsis has to offer of its eight planets. As early as the settlement of the Dewi system during the Interbellum, the Tarsis system drew the attention of Dreth. Dreth forerunners explored Tarsis and Dewi simultaneously. The choice was made to colonize Dewi instead of Tarsis because of the vibrancy and stability of so many near-Earth moons. Now, that choice seems to reversing itself, with the population of Tarsis growing faster than that of Dewi. Much of that growth, though, comes from independents and unpatriated Vergers looking for a safe place to make a new start.

Industry on Kliot is slowly growing. The heavy metals so abundant in the planet's crust invite exploitation, and the Commonwealth has put out a call, at the insistence of Alita Spinner of Torpoint, for skilled and professional manufacturing experts. The move is sure to irritate Arrivers and stellar nations that want more Verge systems as markets for their own goods and as places to grab raw resources, not Verge systems as sources of competition.

Sometimes, ignorance is bliss. Especially when it's an artificially generated ignorance, a conspiracy of silence created by sentient minds. Such was the case with Talbott. Only a few months ago, the only people who could readily reveal the star Talbott were a few stellar cartographers and astronomers working in the Verge. Today, thanks to the leadership of four pioneers, that has all changed. People from Alaundril to Spes have heard the name Talbott and its crowning achievement, Thorn.

It's understandable that Talbott went ignored by humankind for generations. The dull red star, an M9-classed dwarf, has little to recommend it. The star itself is only barely worthy of the name. Moreover, none of its planets are inhabitable. They're light worlds, too, any valuable minerals or heavier elements lurk deep within the planetary crusts, making it too expensive to mine them.

All of these conditions made Talbott the ideal location for a secret operation. Neither Vergers nor Arrivers came to Talbott, and while no one was looking, four clever industrialists built Thorn Superport Shipyards in ten short years. And now that the galaxy knows of its existence, the system will never be the same. Everyone from the Solars and the Regency to private entrepreneurs and pirates wants a piece of the action.

HISTORY

John Talbott surveyed the nameless star in 2340 for the Nariac Domain. Demonstrating individualism that surprised non-Nariacs, Talbott honored the star with his own name rather than any of the Domain's founders or heroes. Even more unusual was that the Domain apparently never chastised its successful, eccentric explorer.

The data Talbott delivered to the Stellar Ring encouraged no return visit to the four hopeless planets and an asteroid belt. There were dozens of better candidates for colonization or exploitation within the Verge, and the Nariac government issued orders for the exploration to continue until a more suitable system was found. Ironically, the Domain's desire for a Class 1 world on which to build effectively kept them from establishing any colony in the Verge in the pre-GW2 wave of Verge

expansion. A century later, the Nariacs still struggle to catch up with the achievements of others.

After Talbott left his namesake, no one made starfall to the system—or made a record of their trip, at least—for 156 years.

THE AMBITIOUS PLAN

In 2489, the destruction of the Silver Bell colony in Hammer's Star shook the people of the Verge. It was shortly after that event that an enterprising—and wealthy—mechalus businesswoman named Copil

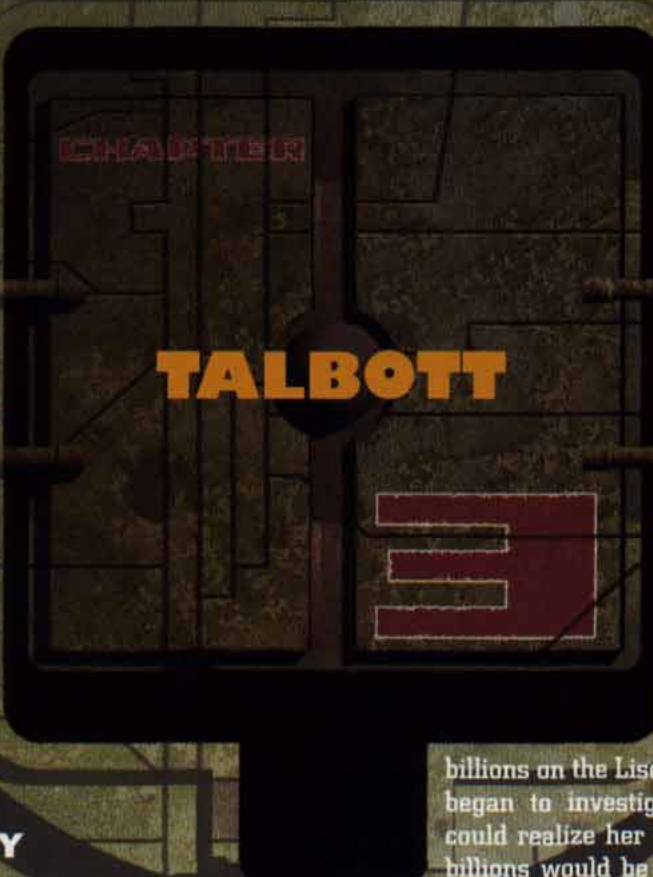
Temma put together a plan to build a second shipyard in the Verge that could produce capital-class ships. It wasn't hard to foresee a future of struggle between Vergers and whoever had attacked Hammer's Star. This level of tension proved even more true once the Arrivers began to show up after 2497. Struggle demanded the instruments of war, even if these sabers would only rattle within their sheaths. In the 26th century, no more obvious and necessary tool of warfare exists than the well-armed driveship.

After making a fortune of billions on the Lison rhodium market, Temma began to investigate means by which she could realize her project. She knew that her billions would be insufficient to the task, so she sought out other investors as well as capable technicians and naval architects.

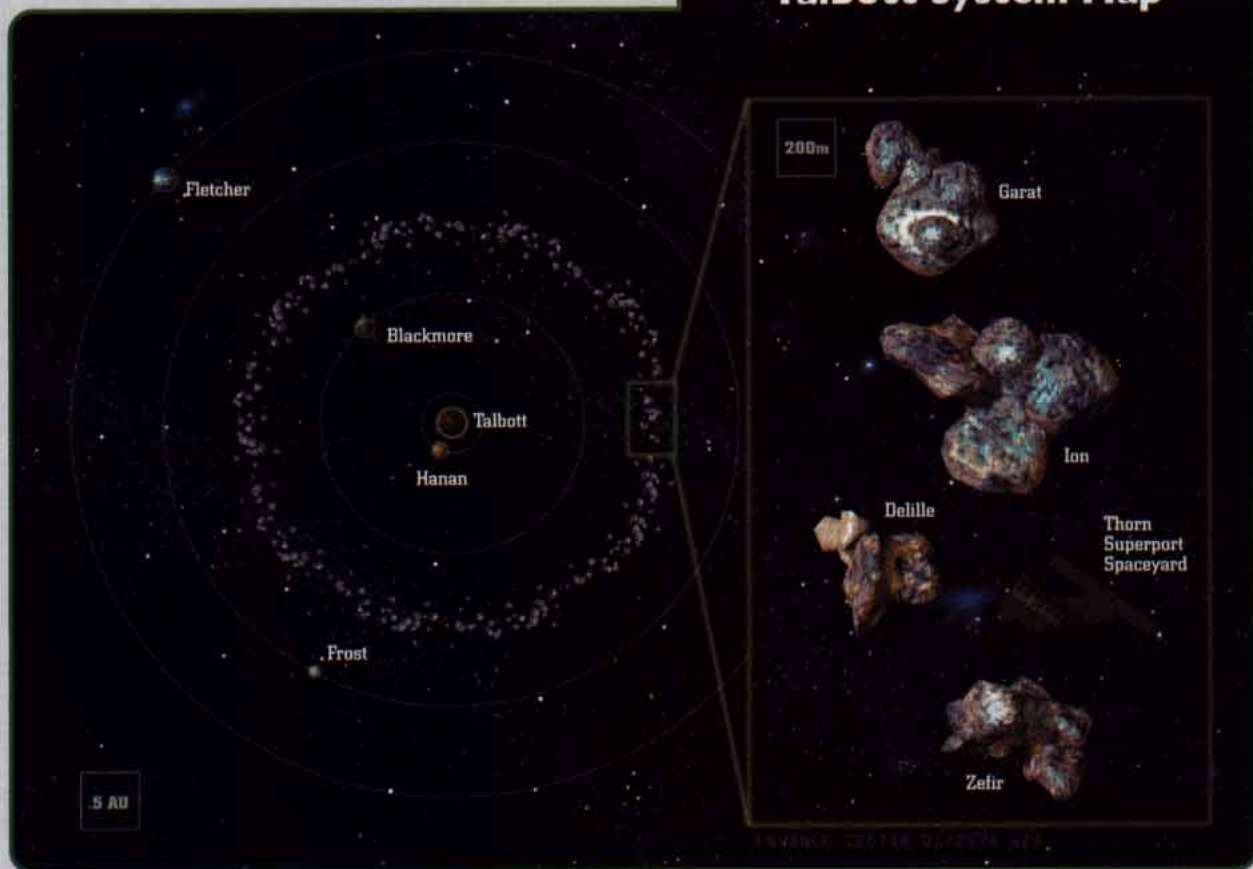
Temma was widely considered the most talented negotiator of her generation in Tribon before leaving to seek new challenges. She had the initiative and means to fund a major project, the sort of venture that only nations indulge in. Her dream of a gigantic orbital shipyard that could rival the ones of Old Space, a megaport that could replace the planetbound shipyards of Alaundril in popularity, profit, and capability, was one she intended to see fulfilled. It was a heady dream, and a project that would take years.

THE PLANNERS

Temma didn't take more than a few days after the destruction of Silver Bell to begin seeking partners. For



Talbot System Map



as wealthy as Temma may have been, she estimated that she had less than 5% of the money she would need to get the project rolling and the construction of the shipyards underway. So Temma began doing something she was already known for: getting investors and partners to share the capital costs and the profits. She began interviewing likely individuals, hosting private conferences with many of the rich and famous in the Verge.

The first person Temma brought in was Koji Lindeberg.

At the time, Lindeberg served as the VP of Shipyard Operations at Ion Productions, the Alaundril-based corporation that would be Copil Temma's competitor. With a single extraction, Temma grabbed a brilliant manager and technical expert and dealt a severe blow to Scott Williamson's company. Delivering that blow pleased Lindeberg, who had his own reasons to dislike his CEO.

Koji Lindeberg didn't bring more than a couple of billion dollars in assets. What he had instead was the knowledge

TABLE 5: TALBOTT SYSTEM

	Hanan	Blackmore	Frost	Fletcher
Primary	Talbot	Talbot	Talbot	Talbot
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 4	Class 5	Class 5
Gravity	G3 (1.30 g)	G1 (0.60 g)	G1 (0.71 g)	G3 (1.37 g)
Radiation	R2 (14 rem/wk)	R2 (2 rem/wk)	R2 (11 rem/wk)	R2 (17 rem/wk)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)
Heat	H1 (-190° C)	H0 (-214° C)	H0 (-240° C)	H0 (-245° C)
Orbital Distance	0.78 AU	1.05 AU	2.38 AU	3.45 AU
Diameter	7,040 km	18,740 km	58,100 km	108,200 km
Year	333 days	878 days	8.21 years	14.33 years
Day	18.5 hours	9.0 hours	14.2 hours	11.8 hours
Axial Tilt	9.9°	31.3°	8.1°	21.7°
Density	2.37	0.41	0.16	0.17
# Satellites	1	0	14	11



COPIL TEMMA CEO, THORN INDUSTRIES

Level 18 mechalus Diplomat (Mindwalker)

STR 8	(0)	INT 15	(+3)
DEX 8	(0)	WIL 12	(+1)
CON 8		PER 12	

Durability: 8/8/4/4

Action check: 13+/12/6/3

Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4

#Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Last resorts: 2

Psionic energy points: 6

Attacks

Unarmed-power 9/4/2 d6s/d6+2s/d4w LI/O

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [8]; Unarmed [8]-power [9]; Acrobatics [8]-zero-g [11]; Modern [8]-pistol [9]; Vehicle Operation [8]; Business [15]-corporate [24]; Computer Science [15]; Knowledge [15]-computer operation [14], language: Standard [17]; Law [15]; Administration [12]-bureaucracy [14], management [18]; Awareness [12]-intuition [14], perception [13]; Resolve [12]-mental [16]; Interaction [12]-bargain [17], charm [16]; Leadership [12]-command [14]; ESP [15]-clairvoyance [16], clairsight [16], mind reading [20], sensitivity [16]; Telepathy [12]-suggest [16].

Copil Temma has a secret she would kill to keep: mind-walking. Fortunately, she hasn't needed to, at least not yet. Few Mindwalkers survive into their fifties without having their talents discovered. In business circles, the practice of using Mindwalkers is strictly forbidden by every nation's law. Thanks to her business skills and contacts, she's never had to risk such an unfriendly revelation.

Copil Temma was the founder of Thorn Industries and she remains its de facto leader, despite the ambitions of many Thorn shareholders. It's a statement of her ability to manipulate business interests—with the help of the occasional mind reading or mental suggestion—that Temma has never learned anything about the industry in which she finds herself. She knows nothing of starship design; she can't even pilot her executive shuttle! In her position, she doesn't need to do either.

Temma's next ambition is rather predictable. Having entered so powerfully onto the field of the Verge's economic power players and been exposed to politics, Temma has embraced some like-minded ambitions. That, more than any other reason, is why more than a few of the warships rolling off the lines bear the corporate logo of Thorn Industries. And their captains, all corporate employees, owe their loyalty to Temma.

ALBERT VAN DER KADE SHAREHOLDER, THORN INDUSTRIES

Level 20 human Free Agent

STR 8	(+1)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 11	(0)	WIL 12	(0)
CON 10		PER 10	

Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action check: 13+/12/6/3
 Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Acrobatics-def	14/7/3	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Laser pistol ¹	14/7/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/0

¹-d4 base situation die

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [8]; Acrobatics [11]-*defensive* [14], *zero-g* [14]; Modern [11]-*pistol* [14]; Vehicle [11]-*space* [14]; Stamina [10]-*endurance* [12]; Business [12]-*corporate* [14], *illicit* [18]; Knowledge [12]-*computer* [13], *language: Standard* [15]; System Operation [12]; Tactics [12]-*space* [14]; Awareness [12]-*intuition* [15]; Street Smart [12]-*criminal* [18]; Deception [10]-*bluff* [16], *bribe* [16], *gamble* [12]; Interaction [10]-*bargain* [12], *charm* [12], *intimidate* [16]; Leadership [10]-*command* [12].

This Solar has witnessed every turn of fortune the Verge can offer. A decade ago, he called seven pirate ships his own; a bounty on his head made him more than worth a million Concord dollars—even before the Vergers knew what a Concord dollar was. Yet his personal fortune easily eclipsed that meager sum, and after making a killing in piracy he decided to go legitimate. He paid off certainly bounty hunters, bribed a few legislators, and made a public apology. Suddenly, he was a respectable businessman working for Redman-Smith Trading Corp.

Van Der Kade can't deny that Temma has a good eye for talent. She wanted someone who could get things done, and she really didn't need to know the details of how it got done. Even better. In the early days, Van Der Kade served as the company CFO; his real job was to keep the flow of supplies running into Talbott. Today, his job is more nebulous. He's on the Thorn Board of Directors with 5% of its stock. But his real job is to act as the head of a corporate counterespionage unit. That makes him the enemy of men like Stefan Galouni.

Van Der Kade derives little pleasure from his work these days, and he longs for the excitement of a new endeavour. He stays for one reason: Sometime along the way, he fell in love with Copil Temma. He has never told her. But in watching her for five years, he has also divined her secret, and now he keeps both hers and his.

of technical matters and equally important, the names of those truly brilliant in the field in starship engineering. Temma set Lindeberg to work designing his dream shipyards while she continued her manhunt.

The next of Temma's team of investors had a more checkered past than his partners. In the Lucullus system, Albert Van Der Kade had some measure of infamy as leader of a corsair fleet. In 2486, he left that behind in order for more respectable employment within the Redman-Smith Trading Corp. Temma recruited Van Der Kade not for his personal fortune, which was considerable, but for his knowledge of Verge commodity markets. The construction and outfitting of the shipyards would require resources from every corner of the frontier and shipments from the Stellar Ring. Van Der Kade had the knowledge and the contacts to put together a shipping empire, and that's just the sort of thing that this shipyard's birth would require. In order to keep their project free of interference, he would be the primary instrument responsible for keeping all of those deliveries secret.

Finally, in 2498 Temma made contact with Peter Breel, a Rignunmor Arriver. A late addition to the team, Breel nonetheless did have much of the wealth that would be required to complete the project, though little of the business acumen to be involved in its operation. Grandnephew of the former Executive Guild of the Rignunmor Star Consortium, Breel inherited a huge fortune from his family. Liquidating assets on Bazaar and throughout Old Space, he transferred his fortunes, and eventually himself, to the Verge. To many of his friends and advisors, it was just the last in a series of blunders; they had no idea exactly what Peter had gotten involved in, but didn't expect that any good would come of it.

The company, later to be named Thorn Industries, had come into existence.

CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

In March of 2491, Temma, Van Der Kade, and Lindeberg scouted the Talbott system and finalized it as a choice for their shipyards. Located not too far from the Verge's center but not a system often used as a waypoint, Talbott seemed perfect. For the rogue entrepreneurs, keeping the shipyard secret seemed the only way to ensure that some government didn't swoop in to seize possession of the work in progress. Later, this became even more important as the stellar nations began to arrive.

Within the Talbott system, the trio decided to further minimize the odds of discovery by building the shipyard within the system's asteroid field. Even if a ship stopped by the system on its way somewhere, a thorough scan of the Foucault Belt was unlikely. So it was underway. Koji Lindeberg dropped a construction beam into space with the name "Thorn" laser-burned into its side. Two months later, the first supply ship landed on Delille, an asteroid that was to serve as the construction team's headquarters over the

next decade. Construction equipment slowly trickled in and the first frame of the tertiary ship-assembly line appeared. A fury of labor ensued. The first timetable called for completion in 2500, and the rush ruled everyone's mind.

The need for secrecy presented incredible challenges, but the group succeeded in preserving the cloak of darkness over Talbott for the next several years. Van Der Kade brought hundreds of shipments to Aegis, where liners owned by the Thorn Industries delivered them secretly to the Talbott system. Van Der Kade paid a fortune in bribes to workers aboard Aegis's Nectaris Station to ignore the starrise signatures of so many vessels coming and going. He also paid the company's technical teams of designers, engineers, and cargo haulers double and triple their normal pay to buy their silence. In his most ingenious trick, he signed a bonus contract with every employee and laborer brought to Talbott. The contract was simple: It promised a sizable financial bonus to every individual involved if the project remained undiscovered until construction ended. If a single soul leaked the news, the contract offered nothing. Thus, every laborer became an enforcer of the secrecy. Moreover, Van Der Kade contributed to the task of "Privacy Enforcement," by bringing in a number of special employees to monitor their coworkers.

Somehow, they pulled it off. Despite two years of construction delays largely caused by the need for secrecy, Thorn Industries watched its shipyards expand and come into being. By 2500, the first space fighter rolled off the line. Then larger craft emerged, with a corvette in spring of 2501 and the first frigate in January 2502. A cruiser and a light carrier, the largest classes of ship that the shipyard ever planned to build, are planned for next year.

At the official opening of the yards, the broken bottle of imported champagne rang with the sound of the victory. The Thorn Shipyards were fully operational.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Their bonuses paid in full, it didn't take long for many among the three thousand Thorn construction employees to spill the secret. Many of them were contract workers whose contract had come to an end. So they told their friends when they returned to Bluefall and elsewhere. They bragged of how much money they had made. They even sold their stories to news agencies for a bit of extra cash.

The flight of rumor pleased the Thorn Board of Directors. Secrecy no longer served any purpose. The first few ships off the assembly lines formed a small fleet to defend the system, and the next waves of ships needed buyers. Indeed, even while the news spread, Temma and Van Der Kade solicited orders from Verge governments and corporations and even Verge citizens. Meanwhile Breel turned to associates among the Arrivers and cut deals of his own. By now, Thorn Industries has such a comprehensive production schedule, though specifics remain proprietary to the



TALBOTT POPULATION 18,878 SENTIENTS

Human 97%

Orion	11%	Austrin	8%
Thuldan	6%	Nariac	7%
Orlamu	5%	Insight	1%
Rigunmor	9%	Hatire	5%
Solar	6%	Borealin	6%
VoidCorp	3%	StarMech	13%
Concord	1%	Independent	19%

Alien 3%

Sesheyan	5%	T'sa	27%
Mechalus	39%	Weren	15%
Fraal	12%	Other	2%

This data comes from a list of Thorn employees working within the Talbott system in June, added to the list of visitors currently granted corporate visas.

company and its clients, that most outsiders guess it should keep busy for the next three years.

Starting in April, Thorn Industries showed a profit, thanks to big contracts with hefty signing bonuses. It's fortunate, since even the deep pockets of its investors had begun to dry up. The company prospectus shows that, all other factors remaining equal, the first four investors might have taken as much as two decades to recoup their capital investment and pay off the banks from whom they had borrowed much of the startup money. Two decades—if not for the decision to go public with the Thorn Industries. In June, the initial public offer (IPO) sold a full 40% of the company's total stock on the Vessy and LIEX (under the symbol THO). In an hour, the influx of investors diluted the foursome's absolute control, but immediately allowed them to infuse the company treasury—and their own private accounts—with much-needed cash.

STELLAR RELATIONS

Private investors reacted fastest to the sudden appearance of Thorn Industries, but the stellar nations and Verge governments have lumbered onto the scene in the last few months. Reaction varies among them, as it always does. Some, such as the Rigunmor Star Consortium and the Regency, simply acknowledge the Talbott system as a new supplier of resources and normalized a new business relationship. Others, including StarMech, the Alaundril government, and the Thuldan Empire, expressed outrage at the conspiracy to create such a center of military might. After all, they say, what's the Concord's role if not to keep conflicts to a minimum and contain the spread of armaments? Aren't the military-grade weapons being outfitted in Talbott supposed to be restricted to official government use? Finally, a few have started moves to step in and "take charge of things." Both the

Nariac Domain and the Union of Sol seek a claim to Talbott.

Startled as they were, everyone with an interest in Talbott made their motivations and biases obvious. Alaundril and its patron StarMech abhor the prospect of a rival, and to that end would love the Concord to shut down the operation as illegal—and maybe even auction off the assets, some of which Ion Productions would love to seize. Meanwhile, the Thuldan Empire stated its objection to the Thorn Shipyards moments after hearing that the Regency of Bluefall had placed an order for military craft.

The Solar Union's ambassador pressed his claim without much of a rationale or pretext. "The Union of Sol," said ambassador Blue River (Hm/Solar/TO-5), "expresses its desire to bring the Talbott system under the fold of its protection." Many think that, should the Solars succeed, they could use the Thorn Shipyards as a point of subtle aggravation for the Galactic Concord. Given at least neutral relations with StarMech, Solar ambassadors might even be able to work out an accommodation with the Tendril coalition.

The Nariac Domain has little in the Verge to call home, and since it is a nation focusing on heavy industries itself, the Thorn Shipyards would complement the Nariac goals of uniting the workers of the galaxy. The Nariacs present a more established claim to Talbott. First, they can point to the system's explorer, and its star's very name, as evidence that they had a prestanding claim. (Granted, they waited for 150 years to press the issue.)

The more interesting of the Nariac attempt to seize Thorn Industries and the system involves a contradiction. An agent of the Domain became active during the Thorn Industries IPO and made massive purchases of stock through several brokers. At present Stefan Galouni (Hm/Nariac/DTO-6) has gathered some 23% of Thorn Industries stock and become a member of its Board of Directors. Yet since Nariacs don't really own anything, in a sense the Domain itself owns stock in a capitalist corporation. But it's for a good cause.

Meanwhile, Albert Van Der Kade, still a shareholder, board member, and force to be reckoned with in the company, has made the threat that he'll scuttle the shipyards before he allows them to be bought.

The Galactic Concord seems to be at a loss. Its vaunted CIB failed to discover Thorn Shipyard prior to the launch of its first fighter, and the Concord's bureaucracy appears more interested in internal recriminations about who should have known and who was at fault in than taking a course of action.

HANAN

Hanan held some hope to distant observers. At only 72 million miles from Talbott, one might think it should be fairly warm. No such luck. Talbott's such a weak star that Hanan would have to be ten times closer to have a chance at Earthlike conditions—and at that proximity, the little star's

radiation would prove prohibitive to life. With an average temperature hovering only 80 degrees above absolute zero, Hanan is a frozen and useless ball of rock glazed over with ice that might have been an atmosphere.

BLACKMORE

Further out still is Blackmore, named for its black surface and low albedo; if not for mass and radar forms of detection, astronomers might not notice Blackmore existed. Almost everyone else has. The planet's low mass indicates that resources are scarce, and there's really no other reason to visit.

THE FOUCAULT ASTEROID BELT

With the dearth of an interesting planet in the system, Temma led the expedition to focus on the smaller rocks and planetoids of the Foucault Asteroid Belt not just for secrecy, but for ease of use. No ship built or refit at the Thorn shipyards needs to negotiate the dangers of atmosphere entry or waste fuel achieving escape velocity. Thorn's advertisement to the Verge makes just such selling points—barbs aimed straight at the Alaundril yards.

Foucault is a fairly dispersed belt without a great deal of valuable minerals or metals to recommend it. Metals can be found, but little mining occurs yet in the belt. The shipyards need refined metals and durasteel, not raw iron, copper, or aluminum ores. Temma wants to erect such refineries somewhere nearby and decrease her corporation's dependence on outside sources, but for now she has to focus on proving the Thorn Shipyards profitable.

The asteroids have in common a dark sky, with the star's dull glow 1.74 AU away. None of them have an atmosphere, which is not surprising, considering that the largest measures only 1,000 kilometers across and masses less than half of a lunar mass. It takes just over 5 years for an asteroid to complete an orbit around Talbott; the spaceyards keep their position near a cluster of asteroids by orbiting at the same rate.

DELILLE

Delille, not the shipyards, served as home to the first humans to live in Talbott, and the lonely asteroid remains home to most visitors to the Talbott system that don't work for Thorn Industries. Corporate housing complexes have been built into the asteroid. Technically designed to serve as residences of workers, they're better known now as the most overpriced accommodations in the Verge. A room little bigger than a coffin and with just as few amenities costs upwards of \$400 per night. Thorn employees quickly soak up the choicest living space and pay about the same amount—per month.

KOJI LINDEBERG VP, THORN INDUSTRIES

Level 18 human Tech Op

STR 11	(+1)	INT 13	(0)
DEX 10	(+1)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 10		PER 10	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Unarmed—brawl	12/6/3	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI/0
9mm ch pistol	12/6/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	HI/0

Defenses

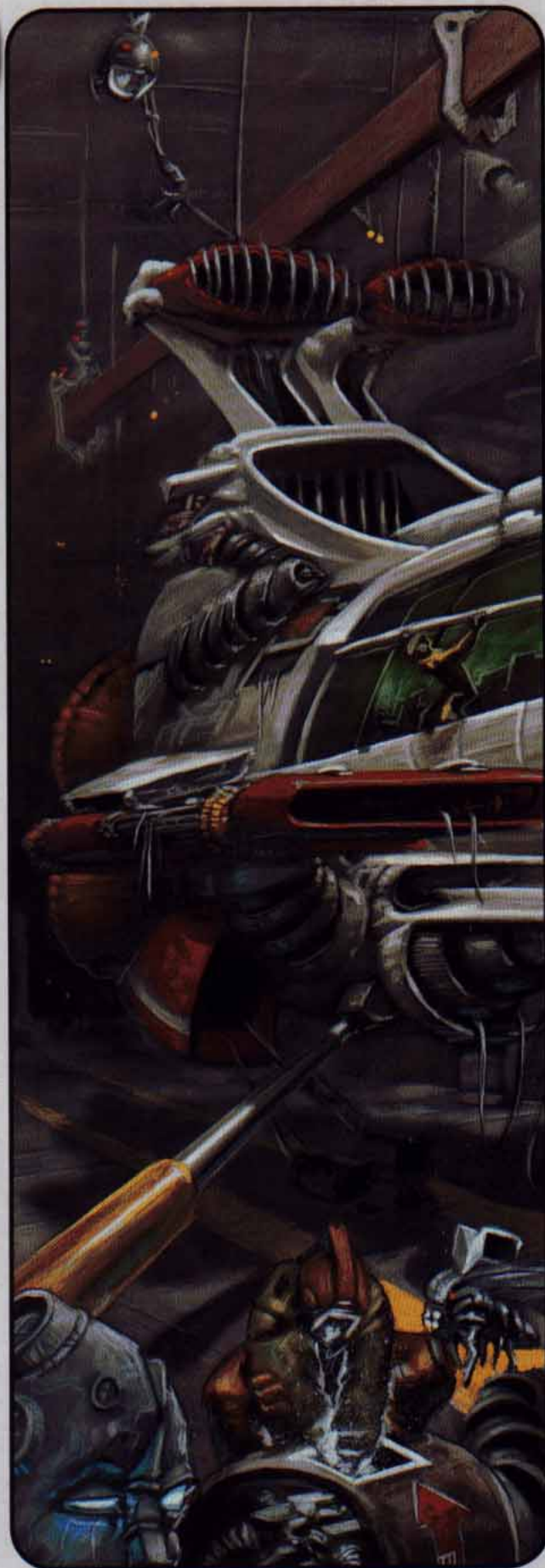
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [11]; Unarmed [11]—brawl [12]; Acrobatics [10]—zero-g [16]; Modern [10]—pistol [12]; Vehicle [10]—air [11], land [11], space [14]; Stamina [10]; Business [13]—corporate [16]; Computer Science [13]; Knowledge [13]—language: Standard [16]; Navigation [13]—system [14], drivespace [16]; Physical [13]—physics [16]; System [13]—engineering [20]; Technical [13]—knowledge: starship construction [22]; Administration [9]—management [13]; Awareness [9]; Interaction [10]—bargain [12], charm [12]; Leadership [10]—inspire [14].

Koji Lindeberg, they say, runs a tight ship. Probably the single greatest reason for Thorn Industries' growing success in the Verge marketplace, Lindeberg served Ion Productions and Scott Williamson well—until Copil Temma realized just what an asset Lindeberg was. With years of experience in yard management, Lindeberg might have been the only man in the Verge capable of taking on the project of the Thorn Shipyards.

But no man is perfect, or can work under perfect conditions. The strain of bringing the shipyards online so fast, and producing vessels so quickly, has worn hard on Lindeberg. Of late, he's forced into the role of crisis management; not a day goes by when he doesn't have to respond to one emergency or another. Most of them stem from Thorn itself, and while Lindeberg could once attribute it to "working the kinks out" now he's begun to doubt whether he's done the good job he was hired for. Most people believe that he has; he's the miracle worker that keeps the place going. All the same, he'd definitely love the chance to relax a bit—or find a capable assistant or two that could take some of the workload off of his hands.



GARAT

The Garat Mining Division of Thorn Industries has high hopes of providing sufficient refined metal to supply the shipyards. Minerals in the asteroid belt may someday provide some of what the company needs for bulk ship plating and structural supports. As it stands, though, Garat's laser-mining operations do not produce what Hedi Litrain (Hi/Austrin/DT0-6), Vice President of the division, expects they will.

ION

Copil Temma prefers to keep outside interests, both corporate and governmental, out of "her system." Even in the sphere of entertainment, she has taken steps to ensure this. The virtual-reality entertainment park inside Ion is the result. Organized by a former construction manager in 2500, the Ion Amusement Park admits some 500 visitors through its doors each night. For many who work for Thorn Industries, it's the only way to celebrate and spend money frivolously. For Apollo Romod, its founder, it's the only way to turn a profit and have fun at the same time.

ZEFIR

Albert Van Der Kade claimed Zefir as his annual bonus in 2499. Since then, he has relocated his personal residence there and surrounded it with security towers, guards, and sensors. When it comes to intrusion, Zefir may be better defended than the shipyards themselves.

Knowing a good thing when they saw it, most of the other Thorn executives, including Temma and Breel, moved from Delille to Zefir. Van Der Kade likes it that way too; his internal security teams find it easier to watch over the important company leaders when they're gathered in one place.

THORN SHIPYARDS

A distant gravitic scan or radar pulse of this section of the system might never reveal the shipyards to be anything more than another of the Foucault Belt's misshapen rocks. In just about every other spectrum of energy, Thorn Shipyards, normally just "Thorn," pulses with industry, a beacon to attract attention.

The shipyards are divided into four general sections, each of which meets the needs of a different type of client. At the center and lowest level of the yard (determined by common reference—the station uses no artificial gravity), lies the widest and shortest of its assembly lines, capable of nothing larger than a escort ship or medium freighter. More than two dozen of these ships are constantly under construction. A small space is also reserved for such vessels undergoing refit or major repair. Gaining access to the tunnel-like tertiary assembly line is relatively easy; many independent

soon-to-be owners haunt "Thorn 3," as it's known, watching the ships they've commissioned come into existence.

Thanks to the willingness of Thorn Industries to fulfill individual customer needs—and its desire to quickly carve a competitive niche—prices for a small to medium-sized ship off of Thorn 3 are generally reduced by 10% or more off standard galactic rates. Moreover, some say that it's possible to cut a deal with Van Der Kade, file a few official-looking documents, and equip a civilian vessel with hardware normally reserved for ships of war (systems with military availability). Of course, for those special offers, the final cost is likely to be two or three times what manufacturers might charge those with the proper credentials.

The second of the lines meets the needs of small corporations, ultrarich individuals, and governments of the Verge. Set out at one edge of the yard and slightly above it, "Thorn 2" is the station's most active. Capable of rolling out frigates, destroyers, and bulk cargo ships of similar size, the second assembly line has, to the surprise of many, seen the longest backlog of orders. Even as technicians and robots rush to complete the ships in six months or less, the list of buyers grows at a faster rate.

The third and largest of the lines, and its youngest, is "Thorn 1," set along the long center spine of the station and running its full length. The first cruiser keel has already been laid, and while that size of craft is nothing special back in the Stellar Ring, here in the Verge it boasts a firepower that few can deter. The first cruiser and light carrier will remain in the service of Thorn Industries, patrolling the Talbott system and keeping it safe for merchants and corporate employees.

A darker rumor surrounds these two vessels: that their construction will be rushed, risking safety failures both during construction and after. If it's true, they may represent a hollow force, barely capable of seeing to the defense of the system. Perhaps more importantly, when the first ships built for sale roll off in the next months, such flaws may carry over. The answer to that question will determine the future of Thorn Industries.

The fourth and final section of the spaceyards rests in a perfect cube at its top. Even the executives of the company get along without the convenience of gravity, although some have been known to retreat to a nearby ship for a more natural feel. Meanwhile, the zero-gravity conditions suit the engineers and construction teams just fine. Above, the company's leadership of some 100 managers, supervisors and execs are split into their own war-

CHAPMAN-CLASS TRADER

Compartments: 6 Dur: 24
Maneuver Rating: 0 Acc: 1 Mpp
Cruise Speed: 2 AU/hour Berthing: 6 crew

Armament: Plasma cannon (turret)
Range: 4/8/16 Mm d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m En(e)/A
Defenses: Stealth shield, stardrive scrambler
Armor: Light neutronite (0 dur) d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)
Computer: Good computer core, Good dedicated battle, navigation, business, defenses, and sensor computers
Engines: Hypermagnetic engine
Power: Mass reactor rated for 10 power factors
Drive: 5 light-years per starfall
Hatches: Security (0 dur)

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1-2	Command	Command deck (0/0) Stealth shield (2/2) Multiband radar (0/0) Mass detector (1/0) EM detector (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/1) Reentry capsule (0/0) Airlock (0/0) Good computer core (2/0)	10/10/5
3-4	Engineering	Hypermagnetic engine (4/6) Autosupport unit (0/1) Stardrive (3/*)	14/14/7
5-7	Auxiliary	Mass reactor (4/*) Autosupport unit (0/1)	8/8/4
11-15	Weapons	Turret: plasma cannon (4/3) Stardrive scrambler (1/2)	10/10/5
11-15	Crew	Crew quarters (1/0)	2/2/1
16-20	Cargo	Autocargo (2/2)	4/4/2

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Plasma cannon	0	4/8/16	En (e)	d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m	3

With a mighty plasma cannon and such a small cargo space within, the *Chapman* trader might be mistaken for a military craft, or even a pirate masquerading as a simple trader. And perhaps it can fulfill such missions. But the designer of the trader intended it for a unique purpose: covert delivery of high-value goods. That's why the *Chapman* comes equipped with a stealth shield and a stardrive scrambler. No one will know where the ship is or where it's going. All the technology does mean that Thorn can't legally sell the *Chapman* to those to whom the Concord has not cleared, but it's a busy system and busy government that oversees such things.

The list cost for the *Chapman*, not including whatever bribes or document manufacturing may be required to facilitate its purchase, is \$4,650,000.

PETER BREEL CHAIRMAN, THORN CORPORATION

Level 1 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 10	(0)	INT 10	(0)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 9		PER 11	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 10+/11/5/2
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed¹ 5/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/0
¹ +d4 base situation die

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [10]; Vehicle Operation [10]; Stamina [9]; Business [10]-*corporate* [12]; Knowledge [10]-*computer* [11], *language: Standard* [13], *language: Rigunmor* [13]; Administration [9]-*management* [11]; Awareness [9]; Deception [11]-*gamble* [12]; Entertainment [11]-*musical instrument: delta synthesizer* [14]; Interaction [11]-*bargain* [12], *charm* [14], *taunt* [14].

Peter Breel came to Thorn Industries as nothing more than a very wealthy investor. He had no special skills or business talents to recommend him—only the inordinately large inheritance left him by Alison Breel, former Chief Guildler and sister to his grandmother. Not much has changed. Today, Breel is Chairman of Thorn's Board of Directors. In theory, he may be at least as powerful as Temma, the company's president. In reality, though, nothing has changed. Breel is a rich man who still doesn't actually have the talent to run Thorn Industries, just a growing pile of Concord dollars.

He would, however, like to change that. Breel owns about 28% of the company stock, and he'd love to engineer a takeover that would put him wholly in charge of things. To that end, he's advocated additional stock offerings, and he's snatched up every share he could find trading on open markets. But it's unlikely, even given his capital, that he'll buy his way directly into things; he has his limits, and there's not that much Thorn stock available in the open. So he's willing to deal with the Nariacs, as repugnant a prospect as many of his coworkers find the idea.

Put simply, Thorn is the only successful thing that Breel has ever been associated with, and he's bound and determined to use it and earn his place in the ledgers of Rigunmor history. A few well-placed scandals, maybe a murder or two, and he's there.

ren of offices. And since there's no gravity, the halls of the complex run every direction. It was Lindeberg's first and last attempt at office design.

SYSTEM LOG

In Talbott, nothing seems firmly decided. The system falls under Concord rule, but the Concord hasn't stepped in to govern. Stellar nations and Verge governments would love to get involved, and they certainly will as time advances. For much of the Verge, word of Talbott and the Thorn Shipyards has just begun to spread. Some of the most far-flung systems and small colonies may not catch news of it for months to come. But once they do, word of the events in the Talbott system will almost definitely continue to flow.

BOMAN CORP CANCELS ORDER

Last week, the Boman Terraforming Corporation of Spes cancelled a private order placed only a month previously. The order was for three military-grade frigates and twice as many well-armed corvettes. No one believed Boman's stated reason for wanting the warships—to escort its terraforming engineers to and from Spes—but neither did anyone mind, since the Austrins employed by Boman have their targeting scopes focused on clicks.

Just why Boman canceled the order under the terms of an undisclosed settlement with Thorn Industries is anyone's guess. Common theories range from disappointment with their weapon batteries, inability to complete the full payment, and even pressure from StarMech and Alaundril. If this last is the case, it could be merely the first shot fired in an economic war that many analysts are expecting.

Regardless of that, one result is clear. Three frigates and six corvettes, ready to leave their assembly lines in less than a month, will be immediately up for auction. Given the Austrins' refusal to purchase, they may go for a song.

REDMAN-SMITH ADDS TALBOTT TO LIST OF MOST-FAVORED SYSTEMS

The news that the Verge's largest trading guild would extend open arms to Talbott came as a surprise to some. Talbott has a small consumer base, almost no resource production, and no significant manufacturing center other than its chief export of starships. So why did Redman-Smith list Talbott among its common routes and thus encourage trade in the system? Surely, a deal has been signed somewhere.

Thorn Industries' benefits are clear. A stable source of supply, influx of merchants and potential customers—all of these are good things. For Redman-Smith, the answer may be nothing more than the support of a large independent Verge company. Redman-Smith has been known to engage in such enlightened self-interest in the past; after all, should the stellar nations become too dominating, there will be no need for a guild of free traders in the Verge.

Then, there's another fact that seems clear. In the last few weeks, Thorn Industries has announced that it will restructure the schedule of ship production on the line known as Thorn 3, causing many traders to panic over their big investments. What also seems clear is that members of Redman-Smith's guild are being given preferential treatment in orders and delivery. Everyone else can wait the extra few months. On word of this, guild membership in Talbott and other systems has begun to rise.

THORN ACCUSED OF INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE

A representative of Ion Productions accused Thorn Shipyards of stealing the production schedule for a new class of system-defense boats. Spokesperson Mary Kilean gave a brief statement to TVN stating that Ion Productions intends to pursue in Concord court a case against Thorn Shipyards that will prove Thorn had prior knowledge of the details of the production schedule of the *Sunrise*-class system-defense craft. Kilean said that Ion lawyers are drawing up the evidence that will show that Thorn commissioned a team of professional industrial spies to acquire the schedule.

Thorn vehemently denies the allegations. Thorn president Copil Temma claims the allegations are merely a way of bringing a halt to their production of their *Targe*-class SDB.

With tensions remaining high in the Verge, the system-defense market is likely to be a lucrative one. Until recently, only Ion productions and some of the smaller Alaundril shipyards have had any success in the system defense market. Drydocks on Bluefall have also entered the market, but to date, the principal customer for Bluefall shipyards' fine designs has been the Regency itself.

Thorn has made no secret of its desire to corner the system defense market. A month ago, Thorn introduced the *Targe* SDB. Naval experts have already given the design high marks, although they reserve their judgment as to its actual performance. Maneuverable, armored, and well-armed, the *Targe*-class boats will likely prove a thorn in the foot of the Alaundril lion.

TARGE-CLASS SYSTEM DEFENSE BOAT

Compartments: 8 Dur: 40
Maneuver Rating: -1 Acc: 3 Mpp
Cruise Speed: 2 AU/hour Berthing: 12 crew

Armament: Plasma cannon turret
Range: 4/8/16 Mm d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m En(e)/A
Launch tube w/15 missiles (15 PLA)
Defenses: Good damage control
Armor: Medium neutronite (4 dur) d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)
Computer: Good computer core, Good dedicated battle, engineering, navigation, sensor, and tactical computers
Engines: Induction engine
Power: Mass reactor rated for 20 power factors
Drive: none
Hatches: Security (0 dur)

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
—	Command	Good computer core (2/0) 2 Marginal computer core (0/0) 2 Multiband radar (0/0) Mass detector (1/0) 2 EM detector (0/0) 2 IR detector (0/0) 2 Radio transceiver (0/2) 2 Laser transceiver (0/2) Mass transceiver (1/1) Good damage control (2/2) Reentry capsule (0/0) Airlock (0/0)	12/12/6
1-2	Engineering 1	Mass reactor (4/*) Autosupport unit (0/1)	8/8/4
3-4	Engineering 2	Mass reactor (2/*) Induction engine (5/5) Stabilizer (1/0) Autosupport unit (0/1)	16/16/8
5-6	Engineering 3	Mass reactor (2/*) Induction engine (5/5) Stabilizer (1/0) Autosupport unit (0/1)	16/16/8
7-9	Weapons 1	Plasma cannon in turret (4/3)	8/8/4
10-12	Weapons 2	Launch tube and magazine (4/1)	8/8/4
13-16	Crew	Crew quarters (1/0)	2/2/1
17-20	Crew	Crew quarters (1/0)	2/2/1

This is Thorn's entry into the potentially lucrative system-defense market. While tensions in the Verge remain high, systems look to defending their own territories. The *Targe*-class system defense boat is designed to fill that need. It is not fitted with a stardrive, but it can be carried to other systems aboard larger craft. As yet, few orders have been placed at Thorn, a situation the executives hope will soon change.

Fate never intended the Karnath system for humanity. Yet for the last 167 years, its men and women have proven their tenacity, their creativity, and even their capacity for avarice. They've made the worlds of Karnath into a ready, if not perfect, home. That's not an uncommon parade of progress in the Verge, but here that two-legged march threatens to trample over a four-legged destiny.

The Karnath system consists of a single F5 primary star orbited by 13 rocky worlds. Interestingly, none of its many planets attracted much material out of the giant molecular cloud during the early evolution of the system. As a result, they never accumulated the gravity to hold onto the lighter gases (hydrogen and helium) when Karnath ignited and its solar wind blew the remainder of the cloud into the distant reaches of space.

Most of these planets are nothing more than barren chunks of rock cast adrift in the interplanetary void, but two have attracted attention for their combination of friendly characteristics and indigenous life. The stellar nations cast their eyes on the fourth and the fifth worlds, largely to the unhappiness of their inhabitants.

HUMAN HISTORY

Even though Verge systems all share some experiences, each has unique characteristics and events that shaped it and decided its fate. Some followed the now-classic scenario of colonization, abandonment, and resettlement; the history of others, such as Karnath, are complicated and unique.

From the anthropocentric perspective, the greatest source of complication in Karnath today—but with the greatest potential value—is the bhruu, the sentient species of the fourth planet. The original VoidCorp settlers had no idea what they would find, nor did they know that their works and interests would grow beyond their control, thanks to another complication back in the Stellar Ring.

EXPLORATION

The early years of human history in the Karnath system were written by the Employees of VoidCorp. The years of the Interbellum were good ones for the corporation: Profits had reached an unprecedented high and revenues continued to rise in new markets throughout explored space. VoidCorp instituted many new programs and risky ventures as a result. Taking part in the exploration of the Verge became the pet project of ZD582 24JON (deleted), who funded numerous expeditions into unknown reaches of the frontier.

Even before the frigate VCM FF78332 (*Economist*) made starrise in the Karnath system in 2335, expectations of success were high. Long-distance astronomy had revealed about a dozen planets circling the white star, and all of them appeared terrestrial rather than gaseous. If any system had a reasonable chance of possessing a habitable world, Karnath did.

Those same telescopes had transmitted their data to the interstellar Grid of the Stellar Ring, and VoidCorp wished it could claim ownership of the information highways it had been so instrumental in building through human space. For as humanity expanded into the Verge, Karnath was a natural point to race to and explore. In 2330, ZD582 24JON made an unprecedented proclamation, claiming Karnath without a VoidCorp ship having visited the system, and threatening retribution should any daring explorer seek to interfere. It was a calculated gamble, not without some risk and certainly with some negative political fallout.

Frigate VCM FF78332's mission paid off in spades, as the saying goes. It confirmed 13 planets, of which two qualified as habitable, if not ideal for human civilization. More than that, its commander, MS422 45DOK (Jennifer Roberts) led surveys that showed the existence of numerous lifeforms on the best of the two worlds, designated VCP 8024HJF. Orbital scans even revealed evidence that one of the species demonstrated signs of sentience. The first humans in Karnath focused their attention there.

CHAPTER

KARNATH

4

FIRST CONTACT

After a few days of study, a VoidCorp development team descended to the planet's surface, accompanied by legal counsel and holorecording devices. They journeyed to the banks of the Amughu river, where thousands of the "stinking four-legged mammals"—christened VCX 885792 by the official records—had been observed to gather. There, before a stunned and anxious crowd of aliens, VoidCorp demonstrated the power of its technology with blazing lights and thundering engines.

The VoidCorp team had prepared well. They'd secretly observed and listened to the species' customs and language. They even wore nose filters. But it was no use. Despite hours of psychologically tested dialogue, the first conference with a group of lifeform VCX 885792 ended poorly, at least from the perspective of MS422 45DOK, now Chief Executive of the Karnath Development Division. The displays of power and descriptions of fantastic opportunities offered by the company went as well as in any

TABLE 6: KARNATH SYSTEM

	Luumum	Keehrun	Aaleemun	Bhruusil
Primary	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 4	Class 1	Class 1
Gravity	G1 (0.47 g)	G1 (0.63 g)	G2 (0.99 g)	G2 (1.04 g)
Radiation	R4 (100 rem/day)	R3 (50 rem/day)	R1 (5 rem/yr)	R1 (0.7 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P2 (0.91 atm)	P3 (1.33 atm)
Heat	H0-4 (400° C)	H4 (300° C)	H2 (27° C)	H2 (30° C)
Orbital Distance	0.24 AU	0.48 AU	0.89 AU	1.31 AU
Diameter	5,580 km	6,812 km	11,758 km	14,302 km
Year	45.3 days	128 days	323 days	577 days
Day	198 days	34 days	29.5 hours	22.8 hours
Axial Tilt	4.9°	49.4°	18.3°	1°
Density	1.07	1.18	0.97	1.02
# Satellites	0	0	28	10

	Cheerghun	Meechun	Ghiiikun	Kluumalun
Primary	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 4	Class 1	Class 1
Gravity	G1 (0.47 g)	G1 (0.63 g)	G2 (0.99 g)	G2 (1.04 g)
Radiation	R4 (100 rem/day)	R3 (50 rem/day)	R1 (5 rem/yr)	R1 (0.7 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P2 (0.91 atm)	P3 (1.33 atm)
Heat	H0-4 (400° C)	H4 (300° C)	H2 (27° C)	H2 (30° C)
Orbital Distance	0.24 AU	0.48 AU	0.89 AU	1.31 AU
Diameter	5,580 km	6,812 km	11,758 km	14,302 km
Year	45.3 days	128 days	323 days	577 days
Day	198 days	34 days	29.5 hours	22.8 hours
Axial Tilt	4.9°	49.4°	18.3°	1°
Density	1.07	1.18	0.97	1.02
# Satellites	0	0	28	10

	Ruurmun	Nheelun	Kuumun	Khiikilun	Saakihlun
Primary	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi	Dewi
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 4	Class 1	Class 1	Class 5
Gravity	G1 (0.47 g)	G1 (0.63 g)	G2 (0.99 g)	G2 (1.04 g)	G3 (1.29 g)
Radiation	R4 (100 rem/day)	R3 (50 rem/day)	R1 (5 rem/yr)	R1 (0.7 rem/yr)	R4 (400 rem/hr)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A1 (H ₂ , He)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P2 (0.91 atm)	P3 (1.33 atm)	P5 (gas giant)
Heat	H0-4 (400° C)	H4 (300° C)	H2 (27° C)	H2 (30° C)	H0 (-120° C)
Orbital Distance	0.24 AU	0.48 AU	0.89 AU	1.31 AU	2.08 AU
Diameter	5,580 km	6,812 km	11,758 km	14,302 km	46,210 km
Year	45.3 days	128 days	323 days	577 days	1,154 days
Day	198 days	34 days	29.5 hours	22.8 hours	19.7 hours
Axial Tilt	4.9°	49.4°	18.3°	1°	20.1°
Density	1.07	1.18	0.97	1.02	0.35
# Satellites	0	0	1	0	6

PREVIOUS REFERENCES

The Karnath star system was introduced in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting with a short description of its history and its two most significant worlds (see *Chapter 4: The Verge*). The *Bhruusil* chapter in the *Alien Compendium* accessory provides additional information on three species that live on the world of Bhruusil: the bhruu, the blackworm, and the razorcat. Gamemasters and players may want to review these references and keep them handy; this section assumes such information is available.

rehearsal. The aliens couldn't conceal their awe. Yet when the time came for the head of the local *abhaal* (the bhruu word for a mobile community, plural *abhaala*) to sign the standard alien integration compact, he stubbornly refused. No amount of persuasion could change his mind.

Without that claim on the aliens' lives, VoidCorp had to view the mission as only a partial success. To be sure, the planet's natural characteristics made it a valuable asset, and the Karnath star system had a good chance to become a new center of influence from which the corporation could build. Still, there would be no magical promotion to a "Z" rank for MS422 45DOK, no chance to parallel the famous JT795 431WQ, creator of the Sesheyan Compact.

The Chief Executive knew she had to get the aliens to provide that critical agreement, which would incontrovertibly demonstrate their complete integration under corporate law and earn the grudging respect of the stellar nations. So she tried again. Following precedent, she ordered the quiet "cancellation" of the first group of natives so they could not contaminate further attempts. A second conference was held, and eventually a third, with the same results. Finally, MS422 45DOK resigned herself to the more lengthy diplomatic route rather than risk discovery through exhumation. The development team went ahead and built a permanent, albeit small, VoidCorp installation on the banks of the Amughu river, and christened it Kansas Station.

A decade passed with little change. It defied VoidCorp understanding that they couldn't find at least one representative of the species who would agree to the terms of the compact. But before irate leaders on Catalog could have the Chief Executive replaced or order a military solution, the Second Galactic War began. By 2354, the Karnath system was once again largely devoid of human life. During the first half of the Long Silence, only the occasional VoidCorp scientist or Verger prospector dropped by. They found the natives just as friendly as always, but no more willing to join human culture.

THE LONG SILENCE

Meanwhile in Old Space, Insight slowly prepared for its independence. No documentary evidence exists to credit the

idea's inception, but by 2400 a silent rebellion had begun within VoidCorp (which would come to call it treason). More and more of its Insight Employees gave away secret information and sabotaged important plans.

As the decades rolled by during GW2, even VoidCorp couldn't remain unaware of data leaks and internal strains; a number of Insight agents came under suspicion. Most of them fled to distant corners of space as soon as they felt the corporation's heavy gaze. By 2440, Insight leaders judged that even relocating to a distant planet in the Stellar Ring wouldn't keep them safe. So they initiated a plan to send their refugees far away, where they could never be found by VoidCorp extraction and interrogation teams. They chose Karnath.

COLONIZATION

The Inseers departed from VoidCorp space late in 2448 and arrived safely in Karnath a few months later. Preserving the masquerade of being loyal VoidCorp Employees, the insurrectionists created a convenient fiction: Maybe the aliens of VCP 8024HJF could be harnessed as soldiers in this costly war. Assistance from the Orions and Orlamus was easy to procure, given the desire of both nations to keep the rebels happy and a source of clandestine information.

The reoccupation of Kansas Station proceeded peacefully, but there were changes. Relations with the native population of the planet underwent a dramatic reversal. It helped that the Inseers brought plenty of nose filters and bottles of air-freshening agents—the decades had done nothing to alter the noisome odor of bhruu hides. The Inseers enjoyed the sweet taste of the first open communications with a new alien species.

THE "PRIMITIVE" BHRUU

By most human measurements, the precontact bhruu existed in a civilization roughly equivalent to the human Stone Age (PL 0). They had mastered fire and the basics of domesticating lesser animals. Without agriculture, though, they resembled a humanity predating even the Stone Age. For the instruments of VoidCorp visiting the Verge, this merited the VCX classification, indicating only subsentience.

External measurements can't quantify the development and accumulation of bhruu knowledge. With an intuitive reasoning ability that rivals anything humanity has to offer, the bhruu hold discussions on the nature of chemistry, medicine, and astronomy that place them solidly in the Age of Reason (PL 3). Indeed, among the largest *abhaala*, the Inseers coming to Bhruusil found signs of a budding economy and a structure of coalitions that eventually became the Council of Ubhruusa.

Even before Insight declared independence, which the local Inseers would follow, the colonists here began addressing VCX 885792 by the name they gave themselves: bhruu. They referred to the inner planets of the Karnath system by the names already bestowed on them by the natives: Bhruusil, Cheerghun, and the rest. And the outer planets, invisible even to keen bhruu eyes many millions of kilometers distant, were given names taken from bhruu mythology as the bhruu first used telescopes and spaceships to visit them.

BHRUU HISTORY

The bhruu developed under restrictions that most civilized sentients of the 26th century can't imagine. It's frankly amazing to humans that a species without the power to grasp or to write (having no hands or a similar substitute) could advance to the level of cultural and mental sophistication the bhruu demonstrate. It's especially astounding since the bhruu demonstrate no psionic capacity.

Prior to the arrival of the Inseers in 2449, no reliable recorded history of the bhruu existed. This is not a judgment of humans, but a natural outcome of today's bhruu society. Bhruu have a strong oral tradition that preserves their cultural identity inside and even between the abhaala. It is not, however, even vaguely reliable. With long stretches of the year devoted to leisurely grazing or marches (*bhruu* means "people of the land"), bhruu have a knack for storytelling. Their ability to lie rivals that of Bhruusil's two-legged visitors.

A WORLD OF STORYTELLERS

Storytelling forms the semiofficial record of the planet and also assures cultural education and political stability within the abhaala. The bhruu use their traveling stories to tell one another of weather and grazing conditions and of threats, both potential and real. Even the tough and rugged bhruu can't ignore the cold seasons or an aggressive pack of hungry razorcats. Political stability is reinforced by stories of the fates, some humiliating as well as terrible, that await bhruu who defy their *marhu'u* (small groups of single families) or the *ubhruusa*, chieftains of the abhaala.

Their stories also serve a more esoteric purpose: discussing reality and the state of being. Humans might call these discussions "scientific" or "philosophical," but the bhruu don't draw such distinctions. For bhruu, the development of the mind has proceeded completely in a void. Without the means to confirm much of their intuitive reasoning, they couldn't see the difference between the theories they had developed concerning gravity, the movement of the planets, evolution, beliefs in a creator, a life beyond death, or a proper system of ethics. Though they have developed skeptical systems much like the scientific method, there are significant differences from human habits of thinking. For instance, the bhruu had never considered altering their environment through building shel-

ters, farms, or bridges. Changing the world is something humanity takes for granted; the bhruu have a history of adapting themselves.

The oldest bhruu stories tell of not the creation of the species, but the unification of the first abhaal. According to most legends, before that time bhruu stayed within their *marhu'u* and had little association with other bhruu. Then the *ghree* ("people of the underworld") made a pact with the bhruu and taught them to live together. With the formation of the first large social groups and real leadership under the *ubhruusa*, bhruu cultural development truly got underway. Exchange of ideas increased immensely, and elements of specialization entered society. Though all

bhruu grazed over territory for food, some could devote themselves to finding new grasslands; others to scouting out the enemy; and yet others to childcare, leadership, and thought.

Hence, the formation of the first abhaal marks the real beginning of bhruu civilization. Human sociologists have compared it to the effect of urbanization in the ancient Mediterranean on Earth.

Legends of the *ghree* occasionally attract the attention of Ancientists and other humans interested in xenohistory or hoping for the chance to find a valuable ancient artifact, but nothing concrete has emerged from their inquiries into the nature of the *ghree*. That doesn't stop them from pursuing their investigations.

LANGUAGE OF THE BHRUU

The language of the bhruu proved quite accessible to humans and other species, and it can be mastered with three skill ranks in Knowledge—*language* (*Bhruu*). The language follows certain conventions for names of places and things, though these are slowly decaying with the introduction of many Galactic Standard words and human names for themselves and their universe's places.

The following are some basic rules.

Bhruu tend to pronounce vowel-like sounds for a long beat of two to three seconds. Thus, many transliterated bhruu words have double vowels.

Individual bhruu names end in *-ak*. Names for peoples or species end in a double vowel. Planet names end in *-un*.

Bhruu language has no "v" or "f" sounds, due to the structure of the bhruu mouth. When attempting to pronounce such sounds in Standard, bhruu typically produce a "d" or "b" sound instead (leading to some confusion between Standard words such as "dine," "vine," and "fine").



AN INTERESTING LEGEND

Another bhruu legend has garnered interest from humans resident on and visiting the planet. Like most legends, it's told among all the abhaala; unlike most, the details of this story vary little from one abhaal to the next. The consistency is remarkable, given what good storytellers and prevaricators the bhruu are.

The story tells that when the first *turitaa* (the bhruu word for humans, literally "people of the moon") came to Bhruusil, the bhruu did not know how to react. Many of the oldest stories had predicted the possibility of other sentient life, but also warned that differences between bhruu and nonbhruu might be a source of conflict. So, when VoidCorp arrived, the first bhruu to see humans reacted hesitantly.

In the following days, a stranger came alone to the bhruu, visiting many of the abhaala before they had met the delegation from VoidCorp. He spoke in the language of the bhruu, albeit badly and with many errors in grammar, calling himself *Staahurak* ("sharp grass"). Despite his amusing social gaffes and language blunders, Staahurak conveyed a serious message. He warned the bhruu that they couldn't trust the *turitaa*, but they couldn't afford to anger the powerful strangers either. They must feign interest in joining this odd concept of "stellar nation," but decline any agreements for the moment.

Now that the bhruu have learned more about VoidCorp, especially from the Inseers decades later, they've canonized

Staahurak. He's legendary, revered almost as much as the ancient bhruu heroes. Staahurak helped create the first real planetary government on Bhruusil. Through shared contact with Staahurak and eventually one another, the chieftains of the abhaala formed the Council of Ubhruusa. For the first time ever, the bhruu could present a united front not only to outsiders, but also within their own society.

The Inseers heard the legend too, and they have their own interpretation. Although many records of the first expedition and its personnel have been lost, there's some evidence—and widespread belief—that Staahurak was none other than ZV237 82WBR (Stalker), a key leader in the early days of Insight's rebellion against VoidCorp. The Inseers have encouraged and participated in the glorification of Staahurak's legend, and now it forms a common bond between human and bhruu. Of course, today Staahurak's creation, the Council of Ubhruusa, has its own objectives and priorities, and it often opposes Insight attempts to develop more of the planet the two peoples share.

TODAY

After five decades of shared experience, the inhabitants of Bhruusil have achieved a certain harmony. A whole generation of bhruu has reached maturity on a world cohabited by humanity. Yet the ties remain slender. Humans (and

Most citizens of the Verge have become familiar with VoidCorp system of Employee identification. Few, however, are fully conversant with the means by which VoidCorp identifies its other assets: ships, planets, and even species.

SHIP DESIGNATIONS

VoidCorp vessels have one of two designators: VCM, for military craft; and VCT, for civilian craft. Unfortunately, these two ship codes are of less use to outsiders than one might believe, since they indicate loyalty to one of two internal VoidCorp divisions. Not surprisingly, these two divisions have competitive Vice Presidents who don't follow a narrow definition of their charter. Thus, it's possible to find well-armed escorts with VCT codes and large troop-support freighters with VCM codes. VoidCorp has also been known to falsify its ship codes whenever official or unofficial scheming merits it.

Following these three letters is another two- to three-letter code that indicates the ship's class. A string of five or six digits completes the unique ID code.

BA fortress ship	DD	destroyer
DN dreadnought	FF	frigate
BC battlecruiser	DE	corvette
CA heavy cruiser	PC	cutter
CL light cruiser	SC	scout
CM missile cruiser	LKA	assault ship
CS survey cruiser	SO	space station
CV fleet carrier	SD	defense satellite
LV light carrier	PM	medium freighter
PL light freighter	PZ	bulk freighter

Finally, the chief executive or captain of a vessel may christen the ship with a Standard name, usually listed parenthetically with the ship's ID.

Well-known VoidCorp vessels that have been spotted frequently in the Verge include the following:

VCM CA43532 (*Positive Negotiator*)
 VCM CL13532 (*Good Friend*)
 VCM CV13532 (*Peaceful Delivery*)
 VCM PZ538203 (*Dark Cloud*)
 VCT DD964325 (*Feather*)
 VCT DE46433 (*Solarstorm*)
 VCT LKA859434 (*Ironfree*)
 VCT SO850265 (*Watcher*), in orbit of Hydrocus
 VCT PM65266 (*Seriad*)
 VCT PZ80563 (*Formorian*)

Another vessel, VCM BC25251 (*Poison*) has been spotted several times in Verge systems, but officially lists its patrol within Open Space far from the Verge. That hasn't prevented it from appearing in Corrivale twice in the past year, and in other systems for brief visits. The Concord has repeatedly warned VoidCorp against deploying capital ships in the Verge. Diplomats on both sides have protested the behavior of the other; VoidCorp, for its part, does not agree with the Concord policy of forbidding military craft in the Verge and hopes to lead a coalition of stellar nations with similar views. It's especially galling that no fewer than three Concord dreadnoughts cruise the region—not to mention the occasional visits of the *Monitor* and the *Kordova*, fortress ships of unquestioned military superiority. If the Concord can have visiting fortress ships, what harm can a battlecruiser or two do?

PLANET DESIGNATIONS

VoidCorp catalogers never had the privilege of naming the stars for humanity, but they are industriously providing every planet and moon with its own unique ID. Typically, these codes see use only in internal memoranda, communications with the Nariac, or unofficial contact with Insight. When dealing with other nations, VoidCorp executives usually use the more common names. Hence, VoidCorp codes can become difficult to interpret without a translation guide.

One of several dozen three-letter designators introduces a planet, with the first two letters indicating its nationality. No VoidCorp code acknowledges the existence of an independent Insight, although VI is sometimes used in the Stellar Ring.

AO	Austrin	BR	Borealin
HC	Hatire	ND	Nariac
OL	Orion	OU	Orlamu
RC	Rigunmor	SM	StarMech
ET	Thuldan	US	Solar
VC	VoidCorp	GC	Concord
UN	Unclaimed	IN	Independent

The third letter indicates a planet or moon. The letter P is used for planets; S, for natural satellites. Asteroids, though less common, are usually identified by the letter J. A sequence of seven mixed letters and numbers finishes off the code, although no pattern has been found to distinguish one from another. In typical VoidCorp fashion, a commonly used name may appear parenthetically after the ID.

VOIDCORP DESIGNATIONS (CONT.)

Well-known worlds, either in the Verge or famous enough to be mentioned there include the following:

VCP Z05T52G (Catalog)	VCP 7HE530N (Florirt)
VCS 93JR942 (Grith)	USP 53296JH (Penates)
UNF GNM3409 (Lison)	SMS 580HUID (Alaundril)
VCP 8F3LG7D (Redcrown)	INP 965HADA (Bluefall)
VCP 8024HJF (Bhrusil)	VCP JF1U124 (Cheerghun)

The very existence of monopolistic corporate IDs for worlds provokes a response from pro-independence groups ranging from Liberty 3000 and Concord Free Now; for the latter, it's an excuse for violence. Some Vergers consider it significant that VoidCorp continues to use its own nationality designator for several worlds it no longer has interstellar claim to. Grith, in the Corrivale system, is one example. Bhrusil is another.

VoidCorp hasn't publicly responded to questions on the subject other than making some vague claim that old records take time to be updated. For a corporation that prides itself on state-of-the-art technology, "These things take time" seems a poor explanation. Ironically, it hasn't taken VoidCorp long to adjust its records to reflect the unclaimed and independent Lison and Bluefall, respectively.

SPECIES DESIGNATIONS

Alien species receive no special treatment under VoidCorp law, as most sesheyans will attest. Just like individual Employees, all species that humanity has discovered, or in some cases helped to engineer, are identified by a species code.

Determining each code is a lengthy process that depends on the species' individual characteristics; for example, multicellular, reptilian, mammalian, and so on. Two factors can be easily established, however. The first is a nationality designator indicating possession by a stellar nation. (VoidCorp historians granted the title "Unclaimed" to all Old Earth species in 2383.) These are the same nation codes used for planets.

The second element is a single letter that graphs the rough intelligence of the species: sentient (Z), subsentient (X), high-order animal (N), low-order animal (H), or non-intelligent (E). Vegetation (D), fungoid life (C), single-celled organisms (A), and unknown life forms (U) also have their own codes. The similarity to VoidCorp Employee ranks has not gone without notice or mockery.

A numeric string follows. Unlike most other codes, the number is relevant: its numerical value indicates

roughly when the species was discovered. For example, an unclaimed species encountered today would receive a number exceeding 40 million. The number for a modern VoidCorp-claimed discovery would be just over 4 million.

Common species codes include:

UNZ 1	fraal	ORZ 63	weren
RCZ 912	mechalus	UNZ 97279	t'sa
VCZ 67*	sesheyan	VCX 885792	bhruu

VCN 885815	razorcat
VCH 885817	blackworm
VCN 942459	veractor
VCN 942467	terador
VCN 942503	gandercat
UNZ 40284216	riglia
UNZ 40352622	deepfallen

*The original sesheyan code, VCX 67, although no longer in official use, can still be found in documents dated before 2472.

USING DESIGNATIONS IN PLAY

Gamemasters can find a number of ways to use the designation system presented here to add some flavor and verisimilitude to their campaigns. First of all, consider using codes any time the heroes encounter VoidCorp employees. A combination of corporate-speak and inhuman codes will promote the sense of VoidCorp as a faceless entity.

Of course, there are other opportunities to use VoidCorp IDs during adventures. What do the heroes do with an intercepted communication that reads, "VCT PM65266 executes planned journey to VCS 93JR942 in an effort to suppress VCZ 67"? Not only does it have to be traced and decoded, it must also be translated. The heroes first have to develop a means or find an agent within VoidCorp just to find out how to proceed!

Politically, the publication and use of certain codes have interesting consequences. Why has a species or planet been given the designator VC instead of UN? Maybe a secret document can reveal this information before VoidCorp makes any announcement or deploys its forces.

As well, you can use these designators whenever your heroes encounter new species or new worlds, to heighten the threat of a villainous VoidCorp waiting in the wings.

other humanoid sentients) and bhruu don't share lifestyles or common sentiments—yet. The differences between human and bhruu still seem greater than those of many other sentient species in known space, and most of the abhaala live by traditions that haven't changed in centuries, out of either ignorance or conscious rejection of humanity. Only the occasional scream of a starship or skycar flying above violates the illusion.

On the other hand, abhaala living near Kansas Station or other colonies of offworlders seem a different species altogether. They use technology extensively, custom designed by friendly Inseers to fit bhruu backs, jaws, or horns and be manipulated by foot, tail, or tongue. They've largely abandoned the nomadic tradition, instead keeping to Bhruusil's temperate equator where they raise crops on farms. Agriculture and irrigation have extended what the unification of the abhaala began; an abundance of food and resources means more leisure, cultural advancement, and even travel. These bhruu are learning the advanced sciences: subatomic physics, electromagnetics, and gravity induction. Their entry into the Gravity Age has begun.

Meanwhile, the rest of the Karnath system, largely ignored by Insight and visited only by the bhruu imagination, has witnessed other visitors, both new and old.

RETURN OF THE CORP

VoidCorp executives, while wondering at the lack of communication with the new colony on Bhruusil, did not uncover its treachery until 2496 and the resumption of contact with the Verge. While aboard the *Monitor*, VoidCorp representatives protested strongly against this "routine theft of star systems." They had paid for the exploration of the Karnath system and the construction of Kansas Station on Bhruusil. What right did anyone have to unlawfully seize VoidCorp property? Insight, in turn, made it clear that thousands of Inseers lived on Bhruusil, which represented its largest colony in the Verge. To forcibly remove colonists who had been living there for the last 50 years would be reprehensible, given the Concord's attitude toward self-determination.

Undersecretary Michael Thayne made the call for the Committee on Verge Integration. Bhruusil, he concluded, had become a planet of Insight in accord with the independence of Insight recognized by the Treaty of Concord. However, since the rest of the system had no development by Insight, VoidCorp preserved its more general claim. Insight retained only Bhruusil and the free right of passage in and out of the system. In addition, Insight had to pay reparations of just over 100 million Concord dollars, adjusted for the inflation of many years.

The arbitrated agreement made no one happy. Of course, VoidCorp refused to recognize the independence of Insight, and Inseers on Bhruusil were apprehensive about the appearance of VoidCorp vessels in the system. Some crit-

ics of Thayne observed that it might have been better to grant ownership of the system wholly to either of the two stellar nations rather than leave Karnath divided and a source of future struggle.

While not ecstatic with the results, VoidCorp took what it could get. Ships sped toward the Karnath system and immediately began patrols to demonstrate VoidCorp ownership (mainly to harass Insight craft). Soon after, a development team arrived and set up operations on Cheerghun, the fifth planet. Just over two thousand VoidCorp employees have relocated to the system since 2498.

To everyone's surprise, the last two years have passed with remarkably few confrontations between Insight and VoidCorp in Karnath. A few VoidCorp ships captains bluster and bully Insight vessels into random inspections, and a few computer systems on Cheerghun mysteriously fail on occasion. For two stellar nations that often seem to be in a state of undeclared war, the low-key tension has astounded even Concord observers. Some credit the peace to a policy of reform within VoidCorp. Others say that leaders of both parties, especially the conciliatory Planetary Administrator Heoren DeValk, have been forced to deal with the unpleasant fact of each other's existence, and the difficulties of growing a colony leave no time for wasteful conflict. One opinion even attributes it to longstanding tradition: Insight and VoidCorp worked together in the past, and in the right circumstances the two could still profit from each other.

Only time will tell.

ENTER THE CONCORD

Karnath has slipped through the Concord's grasping fingers. With resources stretched so tightly across the Verge and its many growing star systems, the Concord has found it impossible to devote the necessary expenditures and personnel to every place it might like.

In Karnath, for example, Concord Administrators recommended the construction of a permanent base and frequent patrols of the system; diplomats who feared turmoil here agreed. But it didn't happen. Even the good offices of Michael Thayne can pry only so many Concord dollars loose from the Galactic Consulate, and other commitments in the Verge took precedence.

As a result, the only official Concord presence here for the last several years has been a single Field Administrator. At present, this is Chae Soon-bok (Hi/Concord/DCS-6). There was the short visit of fellow Administrator Ruden Grant and Dr. Alisz Veras during their survey mission, some three years ago. Rumor also holds that a number of Concord Investigative Bureau (CIB) agents work in the system.

The Concord mission in the Karnath system is observation. Without additional assets, it's all that Administrator Soon-bok (and the CIB operatives, if they exist) can do. She has eight years of experience under her belt as an

Administrator, but it's clear that she, like her predecessors, finds it difficult to fulfill her duties in Kansas Station. She doesn't have the freedom to dispense justice as she sees fit and has little in the way of backup when challenged (as is often the case); it would be weeks if not months before a courier ship could relay any request for support.

So Administrator Soon-bok watches the interaction between Insight and VoidCorp and between Inseers and bhruu. Other than raising verbal objections and issuing stern admonitions, all she can do is prepare reports for relay to Concord Administration, the Concord Diplomatic Corps, and the Committee on Verge Integration. As much as she might want to, Soon-bok can do nothing about VoidCorp's terraforming of Cheerghun, for example. Of course, even if the Concord someday has the will and means to do more, it must consider carefully any decision to interfere. After all, keeping even VoidCorp content is one of the Concord's goals.

Two months ago, the Verge witnessed firsthand the Concord's weakness in Karnath. The arrival of the *Lighthouse* insystem was planned to coincide with the opening of a species development team's offices on Bhruusil. The visit should also have spurred all the stellar nations—and others—to take an interest in Karnath. That's not the way it went, though.

In one of the oddest alliances witnessed in the Verge, VoidCorp and Insight strongly resisted the Concord's efforts. The Inseers and VoidCorp Employees independently did their best to discourage any notion of an open-door policy in Karnath. First there was a minor glitch in ordering supplies for the species development team; then the Inseers successfully lobbied to delay deploying a bhruu relations team. This theoretically nonpolitical and nonpartisan scientific group was forced to crawl back aboard the *Lighthouse* just before it made starfall. Business in Karnath went on as usual. Interaction with the bhruu continued to be handled and overseen by Inseers alone.

LUUMUN

Luumun is a little pink planet circling closely about Karnath, the first of a trio of furnace worlds. Its swiftly spinning surface is endlessly scorched, with neither life nor conditions favorable to any sort of life. VoidCorp at first considered Luumun as a source of common metals for building but ultimately abandoned it in favor of Aaleemun, a planet with a more reasonable temperature and closer to Cheerghun, its ultimate destination.

The bhruu gave the planet its name, as they have all of Karnath's worlds. Luumak, according to bhruu legend, was the name of one of the *ghree* (see "Bhruu History" above) that educated the first ubhruusa. The name was chosen because the planet moves so quickly in the sky, and like the *ghree*'s outer shell, is light red. The bhruu practice of nam-

ing planets for people emerged not from mythological belief about heavenly ascendance, but as an honor or commemoration. As long as the name of Luumak has existed in bhruu storytelling, the bhruu have also known that the point of pink light in the sky was a planet, not a demigod.

KEEHRUN

Like Luumun, Keehrun's barren and hot surface has no characteristics of interest to VoidCorp or anyone else. Keehrak was the name of a famous and heroic bhruu, subject of several fables, who wandered over Bhruusil's surface. His tales form the basis of much ancestral knowledge about Bhruusil's climate, ecology, and predators and other dangers.

AALEEMUN

Favorite of Luumak, Aaleemak was one of the first ubhruusa. He gathered together several dozen marhu'u, totaling some three hundred bhruu, in his abhaal. When this planet was later observed by the bhruu, it demonstrated a stability similar to that Aaleemak promised and so received his name. Though the planet is still too hot for easy settlement, Aaleemun's tectonics have proven stable enough for permanent construction.

VoidCorp has taken metals from Aaleemun for the last few years; its low gravity and atmospheric pressure allow even the slowest of bulk freighters to strip away ore from surface mines. Eventually, Cheerghun will replace Aaleemun as a source of metals, but that's still a few years away. The VoidCorp Subdivision of Aaleemun Resources has four stripmines in full operation at any given moment. Large robots and automated drones do much of the labor while their biological controllers rest comfortably in cooler sealed environments. Only a dozen or so VoidCorp employees regularly work on Aaleemun.

Given the lack of any biological evolution on Aaleemun (neither Insight nor VoidCorp has found even a microbe of indigenous life), no one has raised any objection to the rampant destruction caused by gravitic stripmining.

BHRUUSIL

"Though I have journeyed to lands more beautiful, more dangerous, and more alien, never have I walked over earth that made me feel more out of place. As I consider Bhruusil and its people, I wonder what we hope to do here. The bhruu don't need us, and humanity could get by without this world. Despite the best intentions of some, I think Bhruusil has grown because of our worst instincts: greed, territoriality, and never-ending competition."

—Private journal of Ruden Grant, 2499

"Too damned cold and too damned dry." These words, first spoken by VoidCorp officers who surveyed Bhruusil, have

RAAHLAK UBHRUUS, KAAH ABHAAL

Level 10 bhruu Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 14 (+2) INT 12 (+1)

DEX 8 (0) WIL 12 (+1)

CON 13 PER 11

Durability: 13/13/7/7 Action check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: sprint 60, run 40, walk 6 #Actions: 3

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Charge¹ 16/8/4 2d4+2s/2d6+2s/d6+2w LI/O

Trample² 16/8/4 d4+4s/d4+3w/d6+4w LI/O

Tail² 15/7/3 d4+2s/d4+2w/d6+3w LI/O

9mm ch pistol 10/5/2 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m HI/O

¹Must run at least 10 meters to charge.

²May make one trample and one tail attack per action; tail can hit only targets behind and within a 2-meter radius.

Defenses

Armor: d6-1 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [14]-brawl [16]; Modern [8]-pistol [10]; Movement [13]-race [14]; Stamina [13]-endurance [16]; Computer Science [12]; Knowledge [12]-computer [13], language: Bhruu [15], language: Standard [15]; Physical Science [12]; System Operation [12]; Administration [12]; Awareness [12]-intuition [13], perception [13]; Resolve [12]-physical [13]; Culture [11]-diplomacy [14], etiquette: Insight [14], etiquette: bhruu [14], etiquette: Concord [13]; Interaction [11]-charm [12]; Leadership [11]-command [12].

Cyber Gear

Bhruu cyberlimb (Good)³; nanocomputer (Good); self-repair unit (Good); subdermal comm gear; wireless NJack.

³See "Bhruu Technology" for details.

Raahlak defies prediction. For the past 30 years, he has transformed the Kaanh abhaal from conservative tradition that reluctantly tolerated the presence of soap-smelling humanity into the abhaal famous for embracing humans and what they offer.

In the last three years, his course has moderated. Perhaps in learning about human excesses, he wants to slow the conversion of bhruu to a protohuman model. He's encouraged the young males of the tribe not to lose touch with the ancient traditions and sponsored journeys into the uncivilized countryside to remind them of their not-so-recent past. Raahlak has told friends among the Inseers that he's not turning his back on them, just balancing their wisdom with that of his own culture. But it may be too late. The youth pay little attention to Raahlak's advice; the Inseers are simply too interesting and too dazzling.

BHRUUSIL POPULATION 3,153,523 SENTIENTS

Human 6%

Orion	1%	Austrin	0%
Thuldan	0%	Nariac	0%
Orlamu	0%	Insight	91%
Rigunmor	1%	Hatire	0%
Solar	1%	Borealain	1%
VoidCorp	1%	StarMech	0%
Concord	1%	Independent	3%

Alien 94%

Sesheyan	0%	T'sa	0%
Mechalus	0%	Weren	0%
Fraal	0%	Bhruu	99%

Producing accurate estimates of the bhruu population has proven difficult. The data here are from a 2501 "State of Bhruusil" report from Insight to the Galactic Concord. Using the best available statistical modeling from a combination of satellite imagery and census techniques, it's estimated that 504 abhaala live on Bhruusil, with a total population of 2,963,952.

Other sentient aliens, mostly fraal and weren, have come to live on Bhruusil; their total population is only around three hundred.

little truth to them. In comparing it to one-in-a-million worlds like Catalog, Earth, or nearby Bluefall and Spes, that statement might be true, but not when considering the rest of our galaxy's planets. Bhruusil is one of the few worlds where men and women can walk freely without the need for any technology.

Even given the planet's median temperature of 11° C, its equatorial region enjoys summers easily tolerated with only the flimsiest clothing. The winters there are freezing and expose the unsheltered to some risk, but temperatures don't reach below -30° C or so—easily tolerated by hardy human settlers. Within 20 degrees of latitude, though, that changes. Winters conditions are intolerable, with temperatures averaging -50° C.

The bhruu, with their thick coats of hair, can tolerate these winters. They have been known to survive in polar weather as cold as -100° C for up to a week at a time, though they don't appear to enjoy the experience. Indeed, they took pains to explain to the Inseers that bhruu travel thousands of kilometers with the turning of the seasons, not because of the cold, but in search of fresh grazing territory. It's Bhruusil's long orbit that lets them move across the planet at all between seasons.

The vegetation of Bhruusil—mostly grasslands, thanks to a rather high gravity and light rainfall—is subject to drying

out; most of the planet's rain falls in its equatorial zones. It's also subject to overgrazing, and ubhruusa traditionally spend much of their time monitoring the condition of the surrounding lands, sending out patrols dozens of kilometers from the main body.

Agriculture and light industry are changing some of these traditions (see below), but terraforming offers the greatest opportunity for change, probably with a gross alteration in Bhruusil's orbit over the course of decades. Another form of terraforming is already in progress on Cheerghun, and even liberal-minded Inseers occasionally raise the issue in public debate and when talking with bhruu. Of all the policies that Insight considers on Bhruusil, changing the planet's natural path draws the most angry remarks from the Council of Ubhruusa. A few ubhruusa have even threatened violence.

THE ABHAALA

Despite the intrusions of humanity, bhruu social organization hasn't changed much. The most significant alteration came in prehistoric times, when the bhruu moved from the marhu'u-based structure to the abhaal system.

Each year, an abhaal sits in council for eight to ten days to elect its ubhruus. An abhaal's annual moot comes at the

A SPECIAL HONOR

The legendary figure of Staahurak set a precedent among the bhruu. Humans and other sentients who do a special service to an abhaal—not just a single bhruu or marhu'u—are sometimes invited to the annual council, during which they may be accepted as members. They can expect aid when in trouble, protection when hunted by predators, and a share of the grains when sick. One unfortunate consequence may be that the abhaal's enemies and competitors become the new member's enemies too.

Fewer than a hundred humans have ever been so chosen by an ubhruus. The most basic instances have involved rescuing an abhaal from severe weather, plague, or famine. More significantly, some of the inventors of bhruu-capable technology were quickly rewarded with this honor, as were the architects of the Amughu river plain's irrigation system. In accepting the honor, a nonbhruu is thenceforth addressed by bhruu with an *-ak* enclitic attached to his or her name.

No nonbhruu has ever entered the competition to lead a marhu'u, although a few have enjoyed the ceremony as spectators. In a few instances, these rare nonbhruu abhaal members have participated in council discussions, especially those considering an abhaal's split.

LHEEAMAK

"COUNCILOR" MEENH ABHAAL

Level 3 bhruu Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 12	(+1)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 13	(+2)
CON 15		PER 8	

Durability: 15/15/8/8 Action check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: sprint 60, run 40, walk 6 #Actions: 3

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Charge ¹	14/7/3	2d4+1s/2d6+1s/d6+1w	LI/O
Trample ²	14/7/3	d4+3s/d4+2w/d6+3w	LI/O
Tail ²	14/7/3	d4+1s/d4+1w/d6+2w	LI/O
9mm ch pistol	9/4/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	HI/O

¹Must run at least 10 meters to charge.

²May make one trample and one tail attack per action; tail can hit only targets behind and within a 2-meter radius.

Defenses

Armor: d6-1 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [12]-*brawl* [14]; Modern Ranged Weapons [9]; Movement [15]-*trailblazing* [17]; Stamina [15]-*endurance* [16]; Knowledge [11]-*computer* [13]; *language: Bhruu* [14], *language: Standard* [14]; System Operation [11]-*communications* [14]; Administration [13]-*bureaucracy* [14]; Awareness [13]-*intuition* [14]; Culture [8]-*etiquette: bhruu* [9], *etiquette: Concord* [9]; Interaction [8]-*interview* [10]; Leadership [8].

Cyber Gear

Bhruu cyberlimb (Ordinary)³; nanocomputer (Ordinary); subdermal comm gear; wireless NIJack.

³See "Bhruu Technology" for details.

The Meenh abhaal is unique for its embrace of democracy as well as its interest in the greater community among the stars. Implicit in this character is a willingness to innovate on the traditional bhruu social structure. So it's not surprising that females among the Meenh participate more fully in the abhaal's decisions than elsewhere.

It'll be some time yet before the Meenh elect a female ubhruus, but when that day comes, Lheeamak would be a prime candidate. Inquisitive and unwilling to accept tradition as an excuse for foolish behavior, she has been an outspoken voice in the abhaal's weekly meetings. Her lack of tact has made her less popular among the established figures in the community, though, so she's eager to expand her own horizons until the "changing of the guard." She spends as much time as she can listening to Concord communications and watching holovids, and would love nothing more than to go into space and see firsthand the wonders of which she has only heard.



same point in each year until the death of the ubhruus. This event brings an immediate council and a chance for the young; subsequent moots are then held on the anniversary of the new election. Thus, the council dates for individual abhaala vary wildly.

Only the male leaders of marhu'u receive a vote in this council, although females often speak and influence their mates' votes. An incumbent ubhruus has a 95% chance of being reelected, and usually only negligence or death can bring a new ubhruus into leadership.

The council performs two other important functions. In an annual competition that humans quickly christened "bhruu Olympics," young males compete for the right to lead a marhu'u and thus to reproduce. The contests include cross-country races, weight pulling, storytelling, sprinting, and a stamina test that involves standing and walking slowly for as long as possible (usually about three days). About one in twenty males wins a marhu'u; three or four female bhruu become attached to the celebrating winner. The losers, meanwhile, can wait a year to try again or become outcasts and leave the abhaal. Several thousand bhruu, mostly male, live outside the abhaala.

Outsiders, including humans as well as members of foreign abhaala, are not permitted to attend either the council meetings or the competitive sports. (Of course, that's just

fine with many Inseers, since sweating bhruu may be the only thing that smells worse than normal bhruu.) That doesn't prevent observation from a distance, nor has it stopped creative Inseers from outfitting a bhruu with a holorecorder and transmitter for real-time entertainment on the planet. Sprinting is the most popular sport among observers, given that the massive bhruu run as fast as Earth-based equines.

This competition is a natural eugenics program that spurs bhruu towards evolutionary improvement. Only the strongest, toughest, and most intelligent are given the right to breed. However, one interesting change has been seen over the last decade: Many ubhruusa have adopted the practice of awarding one marhu'u immediately following their election. Sometimes this marhu'u goes to one of the ubhruus's heirs, but since males don't give their own progeny special treatment, more often the honor is a special reward for heroes of the abhaal.

The ultimate decision—actually the first to be raised at a council—for any abhaal is whether it has grown too large and should split. Recent developments on Bhruusil have influenced this decision. In the past, the balance of death- and birthrates meant that an abhaal grew slowly and split very rarely—once every few generations. Now, with agriculture, technology, and a fixed location, the abhaala that have adopt-

ed the "new ways" are more resistant to predators and are growing very quickly. The result: a population explosion. Over the last 30 years, these abhaala doubled their size every decade or so and broke into pieces at an equal rate. Rarely, an abhaal may split due to internal conflict or a clash of personalities. The exposure to new ideas and new opportunities has made this sad event more common in the last 30 years.

Slowly, this trend is reversing. The need to divide was once dictated by limited grazing grounds and the logistical challenges in moving several thousand bhruu together over long distances. Today, with greater food supply and communications technology, many abhaala have grown without the need for division. Tradition dictates that an abhaal split when exceeding about 10,000 bhruu; now, the largest of them, Kaanh abhaal, numbers over 30,000.

KAANH ABHAAL

When humans say "the abhaal," they're referring to the Kaanh. Not only the largest by population, the Kaanh abhaal has the most contact with outsiders, both humans and the other sentient species of the Verge. Bhruu of the Kaanh spend their lives surrounded by humanity and its wonders—which are no longer wonders to them. Kaanh and human farmlands along the Amughu river have grown to overlap. Children of the abhaal are taught by both humans and bhruu in the uses and advantages of technology. While still young, many of them choose to install NJacks and other items of cyberware (see "Bhruu Technology" below), all to help them better learn about and deal with what their ubhruus, Raahlak, calls "the future of the bhruu, for better or worse."

Because of its size, Raahlak has instituted some unconventional methods to govern his abhaal, unprecedented in its long history. The seven females in his personal marhu'u have become his lieutenants, referred to as "sububhruus" in a combination of Standard and Bhruu that's common near Kansas Station. The abhaal's annual council in the year following his decision saw a close election, but none since. Contention between the mates, or between their will and Raahlak's, is never allowed to become public—they speak with his voice.

The Kaanh abhaal is one of the oldest, tracing its genealogy through stories that reach back to the legendary times of Luumak and Aaleemak. Despite the abhaal's obviously liberal leanings, its ubhruus commands a great deal of respect in the Council of Ubhruusa. It doesn't hurt that the Council meets on Kaanh lands.

While intellectually aware that not all bhruu are as open-minded or liberal as those of Kaanh abhaal, Inseers can easily forget that elsewhere bhruu have different, more conservative ideas and follow the ancient ways without change. But here, near where the humans live, bhruu of Kaanh abhaal seem like strange relatives, much like the fraal or mechalus, intelligent friends in a lonely cosmos.

LUUNH ABHAAL

Roaming far from the modern ideas of the Kaanh are the traditionalist attitudes supported by the Luunh abhaal. The Luunh wander over Bhruusil's surface from the tolerable climate limits in the extreme south to just north of the planetary equator. Without the permanent home enjoyed by the Kaanh abhaal, the Luunh have only a half-dozen modest campsites to call their own—those and all of the grazing grounds that historically have been theirs.

The bhruu of Luunh abhaal aren't radicals or terrorists, nor are they neo-Luddites of any kind. Unlike the ubhruusa of a few abhaala who follow the ancient ways, Bahluurak (Om/Independent/DCS-4,) hasn't forbidden his bhruu from using Insight technology or cyber gear. Indeed, like most ubhruusa with an interest in planetary politics, Bahluurak has undergone surgery to implant a subdermal communications link under his mighty jaw.

Perhaps because of the Luunh's moderation and its reputation as an energetic abhaal with a young leader, the conservative abhaala allow Bahluurak and the Luunh to act as their voice. It helps that the Luunh abhaal's grazing lands on the Heerhil plateau have become the subject of dispute between Insight and the bhruu (see "The Heerhil Plan" below).

Privately, Bahluurak has little love for humanity, despite the things they have done and can do for the bhruu. Meetings with Planetary Administrator DeValk have convinced him that the Inseers, for all their talk of an enlightened and free future, are just as territorial and competitive as the rest of the stellar nations they claim to deplore. On this distant little corner of space, it's hard for Bahluurak to distinguish between the friendly parentage Insight offers and the absolute dominion that VoidCorp is known for. After all, once the bhruu give up their sovereignty to a foreign state, who knows what will happen? The bhruu have little enough say in the government of their world now, and as Insight citizens they'd likely have less.

MEENH ABHAAL

While the Kaanh and Luunh abhaala are different from one another, they fall easily within the range of standards set over the centuries. Insight observers, always known for their perceptive if quirky eye, point to the Meenh abhaal as a model of the possible future.

The Meenh broke away from the Chuunh abhaal (see below) three years ago, creating a fourth abhaal within the heavily farmed region near the joining of the Amughu and the Gheemee rivers. At only a thousand bhruu, the Meenh is one of the smallest abhaala on Bhruusil—but that's up from around five hundred at its start. What makes the Meenh abhaal unique is its embrace of human-style politics. Ageeak, its ubhruus, has become known for continually seeking the opinion of his bhruu when making decisions of significance. Weekly "town meetings" have become

standard practice. The Meenh abhaal shows all the signs of a fledgling direct democracy.

Looking out to the stars and listening to the voices in its heart, the Meenh abhaal finds the greatest sympathy in a distant, two-legged culture. The Meenh advocate a policy of neutrality as the bhruu learn technology and science from the sentients of the Stellar Ring. Eventually, they want the bhruu to become independent like the t'sa, with their own government and their own state. This talk is pretty revolutionary for bhruu and even for humanity, but many of the Inseer population quietly rally to the Meenh banner. Inseers are, after all, natural revolutionaries.

CHUUNH ABHAAL

One fact makes the Chuunh abhaal especially interesting among the five hundred or so abhaala on Bhruusil: It disappeared. Only last spring, bhruu of Chuunh abhaal could be seen wending their way through the forests of Bulil to Bhruusil's northern grasslands. The last definite satellite imagery records their presence during the summer, peacefully ranging over fields of grain.

Yet two months ago, at the midpoint of the northern hemisphere's autumn, the Chuunh had still not reappeared. Runners from nearby abhaala assisted satellite and aerial reconnaissance in unprecedented cooperation between human and bhruu. For naught. The entire abhaal, numbering close to five thousand bhruu, still hasn't been seen.

THE COUNCIL OF UBHRUUSA

As history has proven, nothing has a greater chance of uniting a population than the threat of an external force. So came into being the Council of Ubhruusa during the first few years of contact with VoidCorp. At the behest of the human Staahurak, the ubhruusa began the practice of meeting one another twice a year to discuss the state of the bhruu and relations with the *turitaa*.

After VoidCorp departed, the Council continued to meet. The ubhruusa couldn't be sure that VoidCorp wouldn't someday return, but even if it never did, there was value in an organization that went beyond a single abhaal. Disputes over grazing territory, information about dangerous outcasts, and warnings about predators or unsafe ground could be discussed with the bhruu as a whole. Although the lack of communications limited inter-abhaala cooperation, for the first time it seemed that the bhruu could act as one.

Insight-donated technology has made the Council into a real government. Radio gear provided to each of the abhaala that wanted it makes the possibility of unification more real. Many of the ubhruusa have NIJacks to call an instantaneous virtual conference. Moreover, skytrucks can ferry ubhruusa to a face-to-face meeting within hours. In many ways, the Council mirrors the Galactic Concord of space, mediating disputes and organizing a common

response and defense for bhruu society. It does not, however, control its own military wing or territory.

The Council still has no real internal organization after more than a century. The five hundred ubhruusa speak freely, but since fewer than half typically participate, it's possible to reach a consensus. Still, the Council takes time to reach decisions, and must rely on members to abide by them. Should an ubhruus disagree with its decrees and violate them, there's no political recourse. In the few such instances, the Council has recalled the recalcitrant ubhruus and persuaded him to mend his ways.

Of late, the principal function of the Council seems to be slowing the advance of human development on Bhruusil. Despite the extreme generosity of the Insight government and individual Inseers, in the last decade the humans have become more insistent about bringing Bhruusil and the bhruu officially into the fold. Bhruu resistance to the Insight plans has grown in direct proportion.

BHRUU TECHNOLOGY

For almost five decades, some very clever minds have set themselves the task of putting the technological miracles of the galaxy into the tails, feet, and tongues of bhruu. The challenge is designing interfaces and tools for bhruu physiology.

Each item of technology presents a unique problem. The bhruu tongue, though dextrous, can't be diverted from its primary function of speaking. The tail can't reach everything and can't be precisely manipulated since the user can't see it without awkward twisting. Hoofed bhruu feet are the least adaptable and in any event must be used for walking and running.

The first generation of bhruu technology made interesting compromises and used clever design techniques. The tail served to mount and manipulate most items, freeing the tongue for use as a trigger, controller, or activator. In later iterations, the tongue-controller was abandoned in favor of voice-activated gear mounted on the back, torso, or underbelly that could respond to the language of the bhruu. Smaller pieces were affixed to the spikes that adorn the bhruu's head.

The most popular—and revolutionary—item was a simple radio transceiver. With a small antenna, microphone, and ear-mounted speaker, a bhruu could speak to anyone on the planet by means of the satellites in orbit. The bhruu have access to a variety of sensor gear: goggles, IR detectors, and even portable radar units. Finally, weapons have been affixed to the backs of bhruu guards and predator-hunters. While these are mostly pistols and the like, the daring Inseers couldn't resist designing a heavy mount for the one-ton bhruu, capable of supporting a plasma gun or a 25mm sabot cannon. It worked.

CYBERTECHNOLOGY

It took some time, but by 2487 Inseer cyberneticists were able to overcome the difficulties of the bhruu nervous system. In only a few years, the old bhruu-adapted gear seemed out of place (though it can still be found all over Bhruusil). Subdermal comm units replaced wired-in radios, and wireless NIJacks opened all sorts of gear up to direct mental control. Nanocomputers let the bhruu step into the "future world" that the Inseers spoke so much of—the Grid. Self-repair units ensure the continuous operation of the cyber gear for years without maintenance.

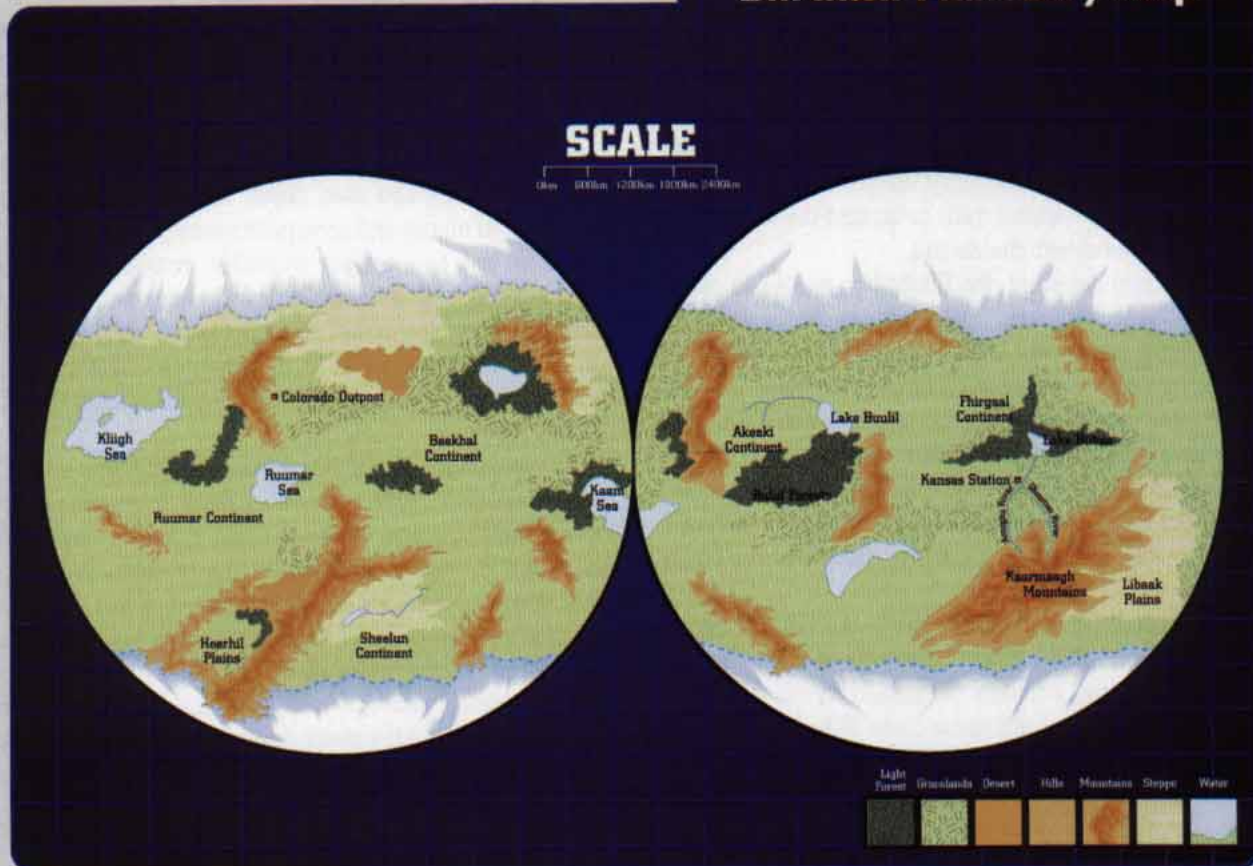
The latest cyberware does not adapt special tools to the bhruu but anthropomorphizes the users themselves, giving them the hands they'll never have. An extensible arm and hand can be installed directly in a bhruu's nervous system with a harness wrapping around the back and under the chin. When not in use, the cyberlimb folds almost completely down so as not to interfere with the bhruu's running stride. A socket attachment system allows the cyberlimb to be deactivated and removed at will. Since neither the bhruu brain nor its nervous system evolved to manipulate the new arm or hand, cybertechnologists used existing biological templating. The optimum choice was the tail; no other appendage could be sacrificed for movement. Thus, as long as the bhruu cyberlimb is active, its owner's tail stays limp and unmoving.

A few bhruu surgically remove their tails, precluding any possible disorientation when switching from tail to arm use. But that's an unpopular choice. The other option is to have Inseer surgeons perform cybersurgery on an infant bhruu whose mental pathways are still developing. With a nanocomputer and a cyberlimb installed in the first year of life, a young bhruu can adapt to using a sixth appendage without any loss of function—it becomes almost natural. For an adult bhruu, it's a long struggle to relearn mental pathways. In game terms, using both cyberlimb and tail requires the expenditure of 20 skill points to master the ability.

The bhruu cyberlimb extends to a length of 1.5 meters, well past the user's head. Two ball-jointed elbows provide excellent mobility, and the six-fingered, double-thumbed hand offers grasping and even some typing ability. The cyberlimb cannot, however, take advantage of the bhruu's natural strength and is relatively weak. There are more specialized, less dextrous cyberlimbs that allow a bhruu to lift heavy objects and even carry them on torso-mounted harnesses, but these remain quite rare.

A bhruu cyberlimb consumes 3 points of cyber tolerance. An Ordinary cyberlimb costs \$5,000 and has an effective Strength score of 6. A Good cyberlimb costs \$12,000 and increases the Strength score to 8, while an Amazing cyberlimb costs \$20,000 and has an effective

Bhruusil Planetary Map



Strength of 10. Standard cyber gear designed for bhruu costs three times the amounts listed in the *Player's Handbook*. Manufacturing centers and surgeons with the appropriate *xenomedicine* skill can be found only on Bhruusil.

FLORA

The savannahs of tall grass that dominate Bhruusil's middle latitudes provide sustenance to bhruu and even to humanity. But beyond this staple grain, thousands of species await cataloguing. Plant life covers Bhruusil in one form or another. In the upper latitudes, cactuslike growths draw their water by chemically warming snow. The plants sprout quickly after having lain dormant for almost half of the year; their prickly surface discourages herbivores from consuming the stalks. The equatorial regions around Lake Bulil possess the only forests, though weak and scanty by Old Earth standards.

AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION

The introduction of agriculture, even more than clever cybertechnological tools, has forever changed life for bhruu, transforming their nomadic existence to an unmoving agrarian one. It also means more efficient food production.

The greatest challenge in Bhruusil agriculture wasn't, as one might expect, convincing the bhruu to try something new. It was building a complex system of canals to tap into the planet's meager water supply and irrigate the dry plateaus. Bhruusil has a rich, fertile topsoil, but without abundant water, the farms would dry up and wither in only a few months. While this might pose no real threat to the current generation of bhruu, who can remember and return to the life of gatherers and grazers, the next generation of many abhaala know nothing about the ancient ways; they would be decimated.

There's no threat of such a catastrophe, though. Insight scientists, foreseeing the effect of agriculture, have wisely made it the single greatest focus of Insight-bhruu cooperation. A greater percentage of Inseers are "agricultural engineers" on Bhruusil than anywhere else in the technologically obsessed stellar nation—even if many would rather experiment with bhruu tech, introduce bhruu to the Grid, or work on the Karnath Grid itself. Inseers proudly point this out to their critics, as if to say that they're just as capable as anyone else when it comes to getting their hands dirty.

Not that technology hasn't helped. Insight scientists have crossfertilized the native Bhruusil grain with strains of wheat and similar crops better suited to cultivation. They've doubled the grain's food-producing capability while enhancing its already formidable tolerance of dry conditions. They've also begun to alter the dark blue coloration of Bhruusil's plants to absorb more of the sun's light—and to make hiding blackworm pests more visible to bhruu and human farmers.

FAUNA

Although they get most of the attention, bhruu aren't the only noteworthy lifeforms on Bhruusil. Plenty of pages have been written on its ecology. Hundreds of other, less advanced herbivore species compete with bhruu for food. There's no shortage of predators and parasites that rely on these herbivores in some way or another. Three native species have special interest to outsiders.

RAZORCAT

Razorcats are well known to humanity through personal encounters and descriptions from the bhruu. They are growing more popular as pets with each passing day. They've been spotted as far away as Bluefall and even Alaundril, serving as ceremonial bodyguards and companions for the rich and famous. Every few months, one of the "well-trained" carnivores goes wild and attacks; the risk involved hasn't deterred fashion, however. The only good thing about the situation, say zoologists, is that razorcats are in demand as pets instead of for their pelts.

Ironically, the normally protective bhruu have taken a fairly pragmatic view of this situation. They have few objections to humans taking away the beasts that hunt them. Indeed, many bhruu have been known to assist human hunters and would-be zookeepers by acting as bait in advance of a hunting party.

GRASSTALL

This species has a special relationship with humanity, if looks count. Short, bipedal herbivores and scavengers, the creatures known colloquially as "grasstall" resemble humans with short claws (without an opposable thumb) and tails. Grasstall show no signs of sentience, a subject of some debate for xenobiologists who favor theories of humanoid-form dominance. To the bhruu and humans of Bhruusil, grasstall are nothing more than an annoyance, aggressive food-thieves that must be periodically driven back into the grasslands in which they live.

HEAVENHAWK

The third species isn't one humanity has a special interest in but does seem to have a special interest in humanity. While most avians on Bhruusil are small and harmless, heavenhawks present a real threat to humans wandering alone or in small numbers on the plains. Beautiful and graceful fliers, heavenhawks are also large carnivores whose favorite prey is the obnoxious grasstall. Normally, this wouldn't bother anyone; indeed, bhruu have long considered heavenhawks a good omen since that meant fewer grasstall lurking about. But the human resemblance to grasstall confuses the predators, and heavenhawk attacks grow more common as Inseers and other Arrivers take to exploring the Bhruusil countryside.

HEAVENHAWK ECOLOGICAL DATA

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H1-H2

Biome: Plains

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 3-12 (3d4)

Organization: Flock

Niche: Carnivore

Intelligence: High-order animal

HEAVENHAWK GAME DATA

STR 7 (d4+5) INT 4 (Animal 8 or d4+6)

DEX 15 (d6+11) WIL 14 (d6+10)

CON 8 (d4+6) PER 2 (Animal 6 or d4+4)

Durability: 8/8/4/4 Action check: 17+/16/8/4

Move: walk 4, fly 60 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Good/3

Attacks

Talons 15/7/3 d4+2s/d4+2w/d6+2w LI/O

Bite 10/5/2 d4w/d4+2w/d4+4w LI/O

Defenses

+3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

+2 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [10]-climb [12], Acrobatics [15]-flight [20],

Stealth [15]-shadow [16], sneak [16], Movement [8],

Awareness [14]-intuition [15], perception [16],

Investigate [14]-track [15].

With a 3-4 meter wingspan, the heavenhawk has no chance of lifting an adult human off the ground. However, a heavenhawk flock makes repeated diving attacks with talons and rending beaks to savage the prey before descending for a bloody feast. Heavenhawks aren't above scavenging, and often trail lost and dying humans. They have demonstrated no sentience but have a natural fear of fires and loud noises.

Game statistics for the grasstall and heavenhawk appear on this page. Refer to the *Alien Compendium* accessory for information on interpreting the ecological data.

AMUGHU RIVER PLAIN

The Kaarmaagh Mountains cast up a high ridge that traps even Bhruusil's scarce waters, which spill down the foothills in streams that join to form the Amughu and Gheemee rivers. In the lower foothills, the two rivers come together as the Amughu to wind for a hundred kilometers and empty

into Lake Biibaa; the mighty river moves thousands of liters each second and has a width of just over a kilometer.

Above the confluence, the rivers run swiftly out of the mountains, carrying sediment and minerals with them in the tumble. Downriver, the united Amughu slows to a crawl, and its course shifts by a kilometer or more each year due to accumulated mud and sandbars, flooding lands that might otherwise make ideal farms. Thus, the river fork is where human and bhruu interests coincide. Both peoples benefit from a steady source of water and today harness the river's strength with small canals and pipes to deliver its nourishment to crops.

KANSAS STATION

A kilometer west of the Amughu-Gheemee confluence, Kansas Station is set on a lush and fertile plain in the center of the Fhirgaal continent. ("Fhirgaal" was an early attempt by Inseers to name geographical regions on Bhruusil; ironically, bhruu can't pronounce the name properly and render it as "Bhirgaal.")

Kansas Station never fulfilled the purpose it was intended to serve. Built by VoidCorp Employees preparing to subjugate Bhruusil's defiant natives, it is enclosed by an electrical perimeter fence built to carry hundreds of amps of current-enough to kill instantly a dozen or more bhruu trying to breach it. Today the fence still stands, but it hasn't been charged for years.

The station marks the first permanent land development on Bhruusil. VoidCorp engineered a canal that streams fresh water from the Amughu through a short course in the center of the station. A second canal, constructed five years after the first, divides the flow of water, sending much of it to the suburban housing and agricultural district.

Once upon a time, Kansas Station was completely surrounded by grasslands. Today farms, houses, and bhruu homesteads encircle its fence. The present-day station is much like the commercial and government center of a large town. Shops and stores occupy the center, and the residential district follows the fence line. On the outskirts are farms and a number of manufacturing campuses. The heart of the Station's commercial district is known for its ability to meet the discreet shopper's needs. An outfitter's store offers camping and exploring gear for the tourists who come to Bhruusil and want to venture into the wilderness or capture a razor-cat. A technology outlet does a brisk business catering to the captive market of Inseers and new bhruu customers.

A map of Kansas Station appears in the *Bhruusil* chapter of the *Alien Compendium* accessory.

PLANETARY ADMINISTRATION

Insight government is always interesting. Whenever outsiders think they have some grasp on the system, one of two things happens. Either they soon discover that they're wrong, or some Inseer realizes the outsiders are correct

HEOREN DeVALK PLANETARY ADMINISTRATOR

Level 7 human Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 8	(0)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 12	(+1)
CON 9		PER 11	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 12+/11/5/2
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
9mm ch pistol	10/5/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	HI/0

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [8]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Modern (9)—*pistol* [10]; Stamina (9); Computer Science [11]; Knowledge [11]—*language: Standard* [14]; Law [11]; System Operation [11]; Technical Science [11]; Administration [12]—*bureaucracy* [18], *management* [17]; Awareness [12]; Culture [11]—*diplomacy* [12], *etiquette: Insight* [14], *etiquette: bhruu* [13]; Deception [11]; Interaction [11]—*bargain* [13], *charm* [12]; Leadership [11].

Cyber Gear

Nanocomputer (Amazing); Wireless NIJack.

Daring he may not be, but hard work has turned the aging Administrator gray and wrinkled before his time. As a leader Heoren DeValk earned the esteem of millions back in the Stellar Ring. For the antiestablishment Inseers, that's an impressive accomplishment. He took the battered and torn world of Isette, sacked during the Second Galactic War, and rejuvenated it into a major source of pride for Insight.

Yet in his four years of leadership on Bhruusil, DeValk hasn't had the success that many hoped for. The Inseers here have watched as, wittingly or no, he damages the healthy relationship with the bhruu they've had for years. Exploiting more of Bhruusil just doesn't score points with the bhruu, nor with more than a few of the local Inseers. To many, it seems as if the nation's leaders on Vision have betrayed the idealism they once stood for.

DeValk has succeeded in making the region near Kansas Station modern and efficient. Where human industry is already accepted, he has done well. Moreover, his programs to educate hundreds of young Inseers and thousands of bhruu have gone marvelously. The prestige of the Staahurak Studio (see the "Staaahurak Studio" section below) is largely his to claim today. Adolescent humans and bhruu are closer together than ever, and in this both parties have something to be proud of.

HIS BIG SECRET

Heoren DeValk suffers from a disease that runs rampant in the Verge and in many areas of the Stellar Ring: He isn't what he pretends to be. Fifty years ago, he worked as a bureaucrat on Isette, a VoidCorp world secretly home to a number of Insight sympathizers. The 30-year-old DeValk had been assigned to his position only four years when Insight declared its independence; Isette was one of the many worlds that flocked to its banner. Unknown to DeValk, the Inseers there had planned the move for years, and most of Isette's population supported the new state. DeValk, a young career bureaucrat, had no real interest in joining a dangerous revolt against his former masters. He had some pride in the MK rank he had achieved. Nevertheless, he didn't accept the offer of amnesty and passage back to VoidCorp space. Isette was all he knew, and like many VoidCorp employees, he had no real love for the corporate leaders and their totalitarian style.

So DeValk pledged loyalty to Insight and continued his job of ensuring education for the people of Isette. The years passed, and DeValk earned the quiet respect of his sometimes eccentric Insight neighbors. He found himself somehow with more and more responsibilities. In turn, he adopted the attitude of an Inseer and began seriously pondering whether the Grid just might be the best chance for human unity.

To DeValk's surprise, in 2497 someone in the chaotic Insight government on Vision chose him to govern the small colony on Bhruusil. The colony had recently lost its leader, and Insight wanted a better tie with its most distant outpost. That's when the trouble began. A VoidCorp operative contacted DeValk during his trip to the Verge. Showing off pictures of the happy DeValk family—long-forgotten parents, brothers, and nieces still living on Catalog—the VoidCorp agent made it clear that from now on, DeValk would accept secret orders from another source.

To date, those instructions have included expanding development on Bhruusil, over the bhruu's objections. They include a policy of friendship toward VoidCorp in the system (as much as the Inseers under DeValk will allow). Though the Inseers wonder when VoidCorp will begin a more provocative or openly hostile stance, the corporation seems content to sit back and run things behind the scenes, manipulating events to its benefit, and preparing for its reascendancy.

("Heaven forbid! We have a stable bureaucratic system!") and takes steps to return things to their more natural state



of disorganization. Most Verge inhabitants enjoy a rather independent existence, and that regional effect only exaggerates the anarchic tendencies of Inseers.

Bhruusil is an exception. Planetary Administrator Heoren DeValk, chosen for his demonstrated competence in the Stellar Ring, is old enough to remember the strict way of life under VoidCorp. While his style of governing has nothing on the draconian system of the megacorporation, it is significantly different from the free, almost anarchic way into which Inseers of many Stellar Ring planets have settled.

At present, around 100,000 Inseers live on Bhruusil, along with a few thousand other humans and non-native alien sentients. No standing legislative or representative body exists on Bhruusil. Governing such a small population follows a simple municipal-style organization. Heoren acts as administrator, taking his cues in legislation and legal affairs from Insight itself. Most governing on Bhruusil happens within the Grid's discursive pathways. The moment an Inseer has an idea about a new way to do something or, more often, disapproves of DeValk's executive decisions, anyone in the system can read his or her statement in moments. An entire legislative session's proceedings can be compressed into a single day of argument, counterargument, and rebuttal. And without the slowness of interstellar communications, conversation and disputes can be resolved quickly (even if not to everyone's satisfaction).

In practice, while any Inseer (or even an Arriver or Verger) can add to the public debate, most don't take the time to read everything, much less comment. Fewer than a hundred sentients are recognized as regular commentators, each with his or her own small body of adherents and fans. Thus, even the Planetary Administrator can't ignore a vociferous speaker on a whim; much of his time must be spent rallying his own supporters or mollifying the opposition.

While they have no official role, these social critics bridge the gap between journalist and government functionary. Indeed, many of them have some position within the administrative bureaucracy on Bhruusil and take orders from DeValk—even as they post their opinions for all to see a moment later. It's quite easy to create an unregistered shadow program to deliver the Inseer's biting prose while the author basks in blissful namelessness. The worst case for DeValk is dealing with these anonymous agents within his government.

THE MUTINY OF TWELVE DUCKS

Starting in 2500, a group of Inseers began a series of damning commentaries on the policies of the DeValk administration. Obvious bhruu sympathizers, the "Twelve Ducks" (so known for their Grid shadows) voice strenuous objection to the "obsession with exploitation" of the Insight government on Bhruusil. More and more of the planet is

coming under development, mining, and forestry. Why? To support the neverending hunger of the stellar nations for resources, they claim.

The Twelve Ducks promise a new direction in government policy. If they cannot change the minds of those in power, they've stated an intent "to mutiny." It's an odd choice of words, given the lack of a real Insight navy, in space or on any of Bhruusil's seas. Despite having no political experience, the Twelve Ducks have won the sympathies of many Inseers.

In truth, they are nothing more than a collection of student activists. The interesting thing about this student organization is that it has members from both major species on the planet: bhruu and human. Together, the Twelve Ducks represent an alliance that's only in its infancy, but has been growing in popularity and its influence. Their still unrealized dream is to bring a different leader or even a different government to power, and with it a form of leadership that will offer not just technology to the bhruu, but the right of complete self-determination—the right of freedom.

Mughrak (Om/Independent/TO-4) and Naesa Reyati (Hf/Insight/TO-3) are the leaders of and inspiration for the Twelve Ducks. While growing up together, the bhruu and human became fast friends who hope that their world can come to share a similar bond.

THE BHUU CONSULATE

The Bhruu Consulate has a special place in the hearts of Inseers. Not only is it one of the first buildings designed to accommodate bhruu needs (stairs, for example, can't be found within), it's unquestionably the finest piece of architecture on the planet.

Here, the Council of Ubhruusa comes together to deal with the Insight government. Unfortunately, in recent years relations between the bhruu and DeValk have become so strained that when the ubhruusa arrive in Kansas Station, it's a sure sign that they mean to take issue with the plans of a man clearly bent on advancing a stellar nation's, not a planetary, agenda.

STAAHURAK STUDIO

Just south of the Bhruu consulate in Kansas Station stands what DeValk refers to as "our proudest achievement." The Staahurak Studio is a free academy of education, open to all sentients from the ages of four to eighteen. The Insight government aims its offer primarily at the bhruu, and currently some three hundred bhruu youths, mostly from the nearby abhaala, regularly attend classes at the Studio side by side with human students.

The curriculum, to no one's surprise, focuses a great deal on the sciences, Verge and human geography, and technology. By the time they leave the Studio, the bhruu are likely to know more about the relationship of Rignunmor to

the United Lison State than about what kind of berries to eat in the low foothills of the Fhirgaal continent. In essence, the Studio offers the opportunity to become a part of a greater universe, but at the expense of traditional lore.

Graduates of the Studio are among the bhruu most likely to leave Bhruusil to see the stars and all the miracles that orbit them. Of course, not all of them leave, and the school's teachers encourage students to share what they've learned with their brothers and sisters. More than a few Studio alumni have returned to their abhaala and gone onto to become ubhruusa. Their success is a tribute to their teachers and a hope for the next generation.

THE CHURCH OF THE ORACLE

At the center of Kansas Station, near the bank of the canal, stands a temple of the Insightful. Like all such places of enlightenment, there are no idols to be found within its open spaces. Indeed, the inside is strangely empty, following a strict neomodern style. A few plaques, accompanied by written text in Bhruu and Standard, attract only the interest of visitors. The real Church of the Oracle is built with walls of electrons. This is a place of sanctity within the Grid, where the Insightful ponder the meaning of truth, their place in the universe, and the future of a humanity bonded through a nonphysical medium. At any given moment, the Grid shadows of hundred or more Inseers can be found within.

For Insightful of a missionary bent (admittedly rare), bhruu present tempting targets, unpolluted as they are by humanity's centuries of deception. The Insightful hope to introduce the bhruu to a medium in which they can exercise their natural, childlike tendency to find the truth. At least, so proclaims Ian Kinross (Hm/Insight/DFA-3), the proud young leader of the congregation. As for the bhruu practice of imaginative (some say even deceitful) storytelling, Kinross discounts it as innocent musing.

THE "BOTTLED GRID" THEORY

Meanwhile, the Church of the Oracle on Bhruusil has become famous for spawning a religious debate that has nothing to do with bringing Insightful vision to a new population.

As long as the sophisticated virtual environment of the Grid existed, so has the ability to communicate from star to star, thanks to Insight itself. With the founding of the Church here on Bhruusil, an almost immediate crisis arose—the Karnath system has no connection to the interstellar Grid. Only through a driveship, typically taking several months to reach Aegis, can information travel to and from the rest of human space.

How could the Insightful share in truth when they were cut off from most of humanity? Inseers have rarely existed in such a state for long, much less permanently. At first, Inseers on Bhruusil despaired of the disconnection, the barrenness of a Grid without avenues for shadows to travel to distant stars. Slowly, those opinions changed. The first Insight-designed

74
KARNATH
Grid without a drivesat relay prospered and grew.

Even the finest drivespace communications link has some delay. Here in the Karnath system, there's no delay at all. For the thousands connected in this sealed "Grid in a bottle," communication is instantaneous—the first necessary step to pure dialogue. So, perhaps it is here that the Church of the Oracle can best develop, at least until technology solves the problems of interstellar communication. Such is the belief of hundreds of Insightful believers coming to Bhruusil in hopes of enlightenment, of union with the divine through human-directed electrons.

KANSAS BASEPORT

At the eastern edge of the station lie the few buildings built by VoidCorp that still stand. The hangar and spaceport facility maintain a healthy separation from the rest of the more public urban center, across the canal. For reasons of safety and security, the Inseers keep citizens without a departure visa from entering the baseport or the surrounding grounds.

Kansas Station's three hangars can each support a single frigate-sized vessel and can even repair a cruiser-sized ship in an emergency. Generally, however, the baseport exists to serve smaller craft, of medium freighter size and smaller. (See *Chapter 1: Expanding Play* in the *Starships* accessory for additional info on this and other types of spaceports.)

HADRIAN HOSPITAL

Hadrian Hospital stands near the center of the Station's commercial district. It primarily serves the medical needs of the community; Amazing facilities provide a -3 step bonus to all Medical Science skill checks. Not surprisingly, the hospital is also the center of knowledge in bhruu anatomy and biology. It's the only place that a bhruu can expect treatment or surgery under the care of physicians with the requisite knowledge (Medical Science—*xenomedicine: bhruu*). The average doctor in Hadrian Hospital has a skill score of 15 (rank 4) in Medical Science—*treatment* and a skill score of 14 (rank 3) in *xenomedicine: bhruu*.

A special wing sees to the implantation of cyber gear. Inseers often install NIJacks and nanocomputers in their children; today, the cybertechnology wing keeps busy by outfitting bhruu with the same gear (tailored to their needs) and with cyberlimbs and specialized items.

The chief cybersurgeon, Dr. Iko Jeta (Mt/Borealine/TO-16), came to Bhruusil to solve the problems of bhruu resistance to neuronc interfacing. After answering that challenge, she's decided to stay—to every bhruu's benefit. She has a skill score of 24 (rank 9) in Medical Science—*surgery* and 24 (rank 9) in *xenomedicine: bhruu*. Her four human residents have an average skill score of 18 (rank 6) in surgery and 16 (rank 4) in *xenomedicine: bhruu*.

BULIIL FORESTS

In the equatorial regions around Lake Buliil, the climate reaches its warmest and wettest extreme. Here, trees have enough water supply to concentrate into forests. For their own protection, the bhruu spend little time in the forest regions; there's little of interest there beyond a local stream or pond. They might use the trees to cool off during the warm summers, but predators such as razorcats rely on the cover for hiding and stalking their prey. When the bhruu do intrude into the forest, they must be wary.

A small lumber business has grown up in the Buliil forests to meet the demand for paper pulp and wooden construction in Karnath and nearby star systems. Even Bluefall imports Bhruusil wood, given the lack of trees on that water world. The normally protectionist bhruu haven't protested too strongly; the Sagorn Lumber Company has taken less than one percent of the adult trees in the forests. Indeed, some bhruu encourage deforestation to control the beasts that hunt them.

Only partly in answer to that desire, human game hunters from the Verge and the Stellar Ring have made Bhruusil and the Buliil forests a stop on their tours to hunt or capture animals—especially dangerous animals. Several thousand razorcats have met their end in this manner, with whole packs dying to humans outfitted with plasma cannons and skycars. A few bhruu have made a tidy profit by leading expeditions into the wood.

Predictably, the steady decline in the predators' numbers has resulted in a population rise in not only bhruu, but all sorts of native fauna. Rodents and other pests have become particular problems and threaten to infest the planet, already known for its fecund native species.

THE HEERHIL PLAN

Administrator DeValk clearly put forth his plan for this mountainous area in an address more than a year ago: "Development of the Heerhil region begins in the third quarter of 2502 and shall continue indefinitely." His reasons are understandable; Insight in the Stellar Ring is desperately hungry for raw resources. And unless Bhruusil begins to show some return on the significant investment that Insight has made, support will be cut and funding reduced. DeValk's course seems reasonable, and despite some misgivings, most of the Insight bureaucracy and many citizens have rallied to his cause. It's not hard to imagine VoidCorp stepping in to take advantage of a weak and underfunded Bhruusil that Inseers would be leaving in droves.

On the other side stand more radical, pro-environment Inseers—and most of the bhruu. Getting at the heavy metals buried beneath the Heerhil mountain ranges will require a massive amount of earthworking. No matter how careful DeValk hopes he can be, the natural habitat, and the ability of the Luunh abhaal to enjoy their ancestral grounds, will be

compromised. The Council of Ubhruusa has thrown down the gauntlet on the issue of Heerhil mining and forestry. The bhruu point to the stars of whose riches humans tell so many stories and say, "Find what you need there."

CHEERGHUN

Millions of kilometers from Bhruusil, a more comprehensive ecological change is underway on Karnath's fifth planet, through the concentrated efforts of VoidCorp. Cheerghun isn't inviting. It's too chilly and its atmosphere too poisonous to support human life. It's also drier than Bhruusil. But it's the best VoidCorp can hope for under the watchful eye of the Concord.

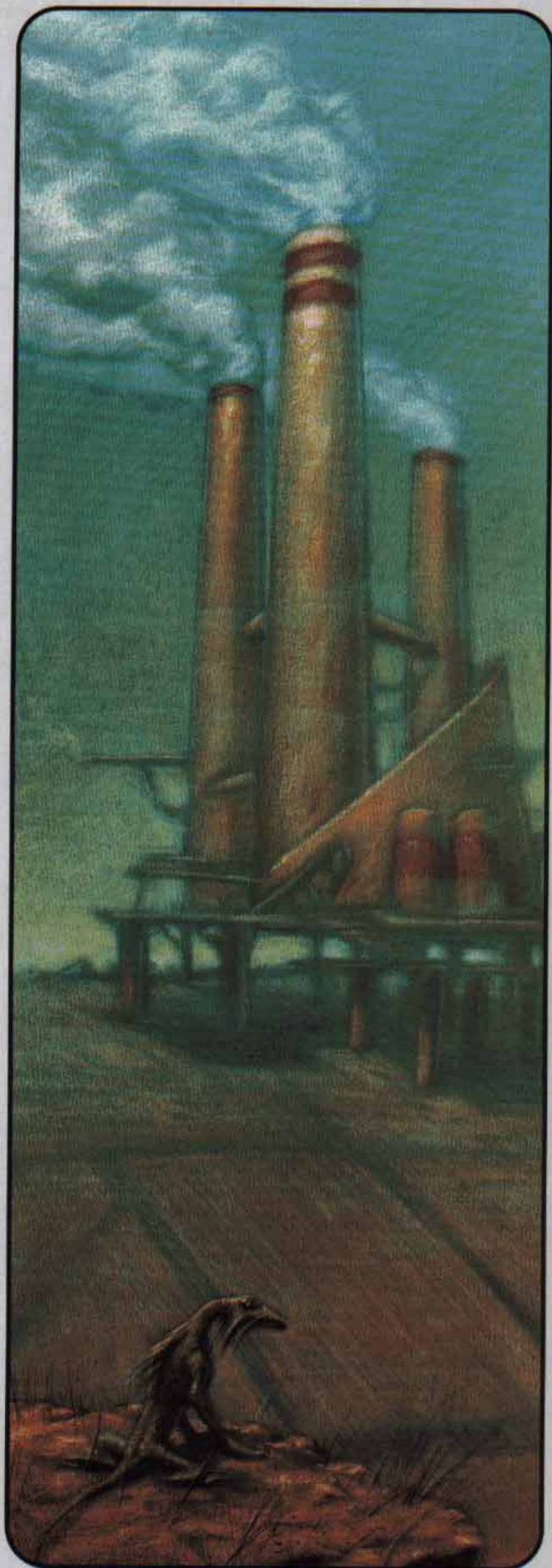
Public records of 2490 indicate that Cheerghun sports an active, if not developed, biosphere. Plants and animals, all adapted to the chlorine atmosphere and cold climate, can be found across the planetary surface. Most plants don't grow to a great height, instead forming wide, hard shells or aqueous surfaces to protect them from the acidic rains. The animal life of Cheerghun exists in early stages of multicellular organization; no vertebrates or animals with a developed nervous system have appeared. Left alone, evolution might have produced such creatures in a billion years or so—but no one thinks that likely now.

The re-creation of Cheerghun began immediately after VoidCorp returned to Karnath. Some executive back on Catalog dug out a venerable memorandum on the possibilities of developing Cheerghun, which formed the basis for the corporation's plan to colonize and extract profit from the planet. This also supports a standing VoidCorp directive to move in close to Insight colonial efforts whenever possible.

Accountants on Catalog might never admit it, but there are easier planets to develop or even terraform. And the money spent here might be used to find new worlds far more suited for humanity. But none of those hypothetical colonies would circle so close to Insight's Bhruusil. VoidCorp has no doubt that someday Insight will return to the fold (after a proper disciplining). One side-effect of that glorious day will be the unification of the Karnath system.

PROGRAM XCL12: PROGRESS REPORT

Given those objectives and expectations, Cheerghun forms an ideal location for some experiments in climatology. After all, Bhruusil will eventually be VoidCorp property. Director of Planetary Development OP412 46JDE (Julia Ryan) has been given a blank check to use whatever means necessary to fast-track the terraforming. In response, she began Program XCL12. At the end of last year, OP412 (Hf/VoidCorp/TO-9) prepared a report to her corporate managers on the state of the project. Somehow the report made its way onto the public Karnath Grid. For many independents and Inseers—who could no longer arrange easy visits to Cheerghun—it was a source of great surprise. Program XCL12 has met with success levels "greater than expected."



Phase I of the project released dozens of tailored microbes, many still in some stage of research and testing, into the planet's atmosphere. Most of them died immediately. A few of the sodium-based microbes, though, bonded with chlorine to form salt and reproduced geometrically. The microbes, whose combination is now sealed as propriety information by OP412's division, have already reduced the chlorine content of Cheerghun's atmosphere by almost half. Salt, the chief byproduct, litters much of the planetary surface like a thin layer of snow. Current estimates hold that within three years, the last of the chlorine will be gone, leaving Cheerghun only a shadow of what it once was. The report describes, in a footnote, the predictable results on Cheerghun's indigenous life. Extant life has been reduced by 80%; slightly higher mortality rates among the flora life-forms should quickly carry over to the fauna. Within a year, no native life will be present on Cheerghun.

Some say that the report is a lie meant for the executives, that it's not possible for the microbes to be so successful. Others agree, but claim the report's duplicity was meant to scare Inseers on Bhruusil and provoke them into offensive action that VoidCorp could take to the Concord. A third voice says it's all true, but warns of unforeseen consequences from the uncontrolled microbes, claiming that chlorine gas will only be the first to fall. Salt may be harmless, but what of sodium peroxide? How much bleach can VoidCorp stand?

Only a few people are in a position to verify the report, and they're not talking. Its broad assertions should be easy to confirm with a single systemship or even a telescope based on Bhruusil. However, patrol craft forbid approach to Cheerghun by any non-VoidCorp vessel. And since 2500, the Insight administration on Bhruusil hasn't released data from public telescopes that view Cheerghun. Administrator DeValk refuses to comment on the issue. Meanwhile, Stage II, oxygen crust mining, has begun on Cheerghun. The first processing stations have already been built to release oxygen from the crust into the planet's atmosphere.

CHEERGHUN STARPORT

Currently under development, Cheerghun's starport will someday equal or even exceed the abilities of its competitor on Bhruusil. At present, it demonstrates only miniport capacity (see *Chapter 1: Expanding Play in the Starships* accessory). It has no ability to repair capital ships and can't even handle more than a few scouts or light freighters. The sole advantage that the starport enjoys is being in orbit. For ships without induction engines or planetary thrusters (or with crews unwilling to descend planetside) it's the only choice, and damaged vessels are often safer not retreating to a planet's surface.

VoidCorp respects the rules of space and the Concord. Any vessel in need of repairs in the Karnath system can expect at least emergency repairs at the starport, up to and including a tractor tow to the station.

CHEERGHUN POPULATION

14,092 SENTIENTS

Human	97%		
Orion	0%	Austrin	0%
Thuldan	0%	Nariac	2%
Orlamu	0%	Insight	0%
Rigunmor	0%	Hatire	0%
Solar	0%	Borealine	0%
VoidCorp	97%	StarMech	0%
Concord	0%	Independent	1%
Alien	3%		
Sesheyan	83%	T'sa	1%
Mechalus	7%	Weren	1%
Fraal	8%		

For now, the still-unfinished starport is also home to fully half of the VoidCorp Employees in the system. The construction of protected housing proceeds slowly on Cheerghun—scientific endeavors have higher priority than the comfort of Employees.

THE OUTER PLANETS

Beyond Cheerghun, another eight planets slowly wind around Karnath. Mostly small, lifeless, and airless rocks, only a few have attracted any interest. Following tradition already established, the Inseers gave the honor of naming these distant worlds to the bhruu, who before technology could never see them with the naked eye. In bestowing their names, Saakihlak, a former ubhruus, continued the custom of commemorating figures from bhruu legend.

MEECHUN

Meechun is the prototypical outer planet, a spherical rock with a dead core surrounded by a thin layer of water and ammonia ice. No one has visited Meechun since VoidCorp resurveyed the system in 2498.

Meechak, an ubhruus of Kaanh abhaal, was the first chieftain to reach a peaceful accommodation with the humans visiting Bhruusil. Raahlak, the current ubhruus, sometimes gazes up into the night sky, looking for the invisible planet as if seeking his ancestor's guidance.

GHIKUN

Ghiikun's only mark of distinction is its oblong shape, probably the result of a collision millennia ago. The bhruu christened the planet for Ghiikak, an intelligent but misshapen bhruu who deserted his abhaal.

KLUUMALUN

One of the two desolate planets to consistently receive visitors, this Class 4 world became home to a StarMech refueling outpost in 2500. A lonely little padport waits the arrival of StarMech vessels, and three even lonelier stewards put in

year-long tours praying for some excitement to spice up their boring social life.

Just why the StarMechs chose Kluumalun over any of the other planets, or why they decided not to use Kansas Station or Cheerghun's starport, is anyone's guess. After all, they still have to pay VoidCorp a usage fee with every year, which makes the refueling depot inordinately unprofitable. Rumors suggest the depot is a base for independent eyes, and some claim that the CIB is the real source of StarMech's funding.

Kluumalun's namesake, Kluumalak, earned fame as one of the first bhruu to negotiate with an agent of VoidCorp and survive. According to legend, he was friends with none other than the legendary Staahurak.

RUURMUN

Seventy years ago, Ruurmak was a beautiful and courted female of a lovely scent that made bhruu shiver (and probably humans too, but for a different reason), but the planet named for her shares none of those characteristics. At least on Ruurmun, Inseers mutter, you couldn't smell 'em. From a distance, the dusty gray world appears calm, but its cratered skin says otherwise.

NHEELUN

Nheelun has little to distinguish itself from the other outer planets, but that little is enough for VoidCorp to deny others any attempt to develop it. Nheelun is just slightly larger than its neighbors, and most of that difference is made up by water. On the surface this water is ice, but beyond a depth of a kilometer or so, it's melted by the intense pressure. The result is an ocean that's several kilometers deep, and reasonably warm. The planet's inner core of rock is believed to be cold and inactive, but it's difficult to say.

Nheelun is attractive as a massive reservoir for desiccated Bhruusil and Cheerghun. VoidCorp has proposed a radical plan to rip massive chunks of ice from Nheelun and collide them with Cheerghun. With a few such impacts, lakes could grow into seas and seas into oceans.

Nheelak, predictably enough, was a bhruu who claimed to be what humans used to call a dowser. He could find sources of water when no one else could—or so the stories say.

HUUMUN

Huumun is a large but barren rocky world that's received few visitors and no prospectors. Its atmosphere is thick with hydrocarbons; it was named after a now-deceased ubhruus, Huumak, known for his dark fur. The Rigunmor Star Consortium once considered leasing Huumun for atmosphere mining, but found imports from Bluefall to be cheaper in the short run.

KHIIKILUN

From a distance, Khiikilun is a majestic vision. A medium-sized terrestrial world, it wears a belt of icy particles that form a scintillating ring when viewed from nearby space. Images of Khiikilun have spread among the abhaala near Kansas Station; even though the bhruu understand the gravitational forces that created the sight, they appreciate it simply for its aesthetic value.

Khiikilak, the misbegotten heir of a Kaanh ubhruus, gave his name to the planet; the old tales say that he was magnificent in appearance, but with a heart of the cold wastes.

SAAKIHLUN

The last lonely speck of matter in the system worthy of the name "planet," Saakihlun hasn't been deemed of any value. Saakihlak indulged his egotism after naming seven of the outer planets after well-known bhruu, and named the last for himself.

KARNATH DEFENSES

Classifying the military capabilities of a star system is fairly easy. It's rated according to the system's overall defensive strength in the event of independent attack (criminal or pirate) or even an organized invasion by a stellar nation or external forces. The Karnath system shares a characteristic with Algernon, though, in that most of its defensive systems are aimed at other inhabitants of the system.

Overall, the Concord classified Karnath as a Type Two system (see *Chapter 4: The Verge* in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting), primarily due to the organized naval patrols by VoidCorp. On average, it has around a dozen vessels, including a frigate or two. Karnath has also become a likely stop for more impressive VoidCorp capital ships such as VCM CA43532 (*Positive Negotiator*), a heavy cruiser and the largest craft that VoidCorp can bring into the Verge without drawing protest from the Galactic Concord.

There are also eight planetary defensive batteries on Bhruusil, each equipped with four heavy fusion beams and four plasma missile launchers. These weapons are normally found only on capital ships and satellites; they stand more than 20 meters tall and extend an equal length into the ground. The best-known and most visible of the Bhruusil batteries is in Kansas Station itself. The others are scattered about the planet to provide the most effective network of coverage.

The batteries strongly discourage mischief, but they could not prevent a serious attempt to invade. Assault ships can sneak under their cover to land ground forces, and Insight has no standing army on the planet, only a small police force. Even VoidCorp's tiny insystem navy could engage the batteries, and—with some losses of their own—take them down one at a time.

ADVENTURE HOOK: MUCH ADO ABOUT THE DOCTOR

The gift of cybertechnology provided the bhruu with the power to share in the marvels of the 26th-century galaxy. For good or ill, evolution didn't steer them into the humanoid model that dominates the stars around them. Without assistance, they could never really participate in a culture forged by and for humans. Technology promises to answer evolution's shortfalls.

Fittingly enough, the chief architect of bhruu neural-interface technology is a mechalus, herself a living example of the merging of neuron and silicon. Dr. Iko Jeta, now the chief cybersurgeon of Hadrian Hospital, designed most of the bhruu cyber gear; implants based on her designs are the only ones available.

In the last few weeks, certain events have begun to suggest a massive deception at work. Could the doctor's engineering marvels conceal a plan to control bhruu against their will?

BACKGROUND

At the last Council of Ubhruusa, several attendees experienced blackouts (or claim to have). These ubhruusa say that they have no memory of the events of the Council, although numerous observers saw them there, even making speeches declaring their opinions on various issues.

In a similar circumstance a week earlier, a group of outcast bhruu males led a parade through Kansas Station, kicking and bleating all the while. They came and went without an explanation. The youths denied their participation later under questioning; most observers attributed it to the bhruu's playfulness and propensity for lying.

Now the bhruu leaders are beginning to wonder. One thing shared by all these individuals is that they have gone under Doctor Jeta's knife; each has cyberware of the latest fashion. Through a connection with one of the abhaala or Insight bureaucrats, the heroes are approached and asked to investigate the phenomena.

Interviews with the subjects don't prove much; they remember nothing, and physical examination of them or their cyberware reveals that everything is working perfectly. None know of any enemies who would seek to destroy or manipulate them. The ubhruusa brought no special agenda to the last Council, and there's no discernable pattern to their activities. Maybe the events can be explained as psychotic or schizophrenic episodes—mass hysteria.

Lead the heroes on the wild-goose chase as long as they can stomach it. They'll probably become quite frustrated, but before they're done, make sure they

interview the good doctor. Though she preserves a cordial exterior, Dr. Jeta reacts poorly. She doesn't want the heroes examining her experimental data or her notes on bhruu technology. It's proprietary information, she claims, and other than flatly denying any involvement, she refuses to discuss the subject.

This may raise suspicions, and the heroes will have to decide whether or not to attempt some examination of the doctor's data against her will—by force, stealth, or duplicity. Meanwhile, Dr. Jeta begins her own investigation, knowing that the bhruu cybertechnology has a fatal flaw. Bhruu neural connections work differently than the mechalus and human templates she began with. It's possible to manipulate the interfaces that Jeta designed to cause a biofeedback loop: A skilled operator can not only communicate with the bhruu through their cyberware, but also take control of them. Dr. Jeta has concealed this information because she knows the harm it could cause the bhruu, and now she wants to know who discovered the secret.

At some point the doctor's investigation will overlap with the heroes' own. Together they should be able to locate the culprit, an Inseer student at Staahurak Studio who stumbled onto the problem and exploited it for his own amusement. No malice was intended, and to date his pranks have been harmless.

In the end, this plot exposes more than it solves. The heroes will have to be both clever and lucky to keep any word of the flaw from going public. The problem is, both Inseers and the bhruu they've adopted have a natural aversion to secrecy. Without that secret, though, much of the bhruu population, especially those closest to humanity, are at risk of exploitation by anyone with a radio and a computer. The bhruu benefit so much from their cyberware that as long as no one knows of its Achilles' heel, they can go on without incident. Meanwhile, Dr. Jeta can go back to work in her labs, designing cyber gear without this flaw.

SUPPORTING CAST

If you need to expand on the stats for Dr. Jeta, start from the Amazing Doctor template in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*. During the course of their investigations, the heroes are likely to encounter technicians, doctors, and students. Use the Ordinary and Good Doctor and Technician templates in the *Gamemaster Guide*. Encounters with bhruu can be handled using the information in the *Alien Compendium* accessory.

SYSTEM LOG

While interstellar observers continue to marvel at the relative harmony between Insight and VoidCorp, the people of the Karnath system have local concerns that are anything but harmonious. The bhruu, having learned the art of war and its instruments, threaten open rebellion should their world be despoiled. Then there's the ubiquitous presence of uncontrolled Inseers

CELINE LENOIR RESIGNS

Long considered a popular Inseer, perhaps even destined to become Planetary Administrator, Special Manager Celine Lenoir has resigned her post unexpectedly. Without comment, she boarded a shuttle that would take her to Aegis and from there to stars unknown. In a public statement, Administrator DeValk said, "It is with deep regret that I say goodbye to Special Manager Lenoir on behalf of all Bhruusil. It goes without saying that in working together for the last few years, we had become close friends. I hope that she can work out her personal family issues and that I can see her at my side again."

Dark rumors surround Lenoir's resignation. According to her close friends, the decision comes as a complete surprise. Only a day before she spoke of long-term plans for the colony. And why didn't she even stop to say farewell to the people she lived and worked with for years?

"TWELVE DUCKS" CONDEMN WATER PLAN

Over the last few weeks, there have been numerous meeages of protest—and even a few acts of Grid vandalism—concerning the VoidCorp plan to "hydrate" Cheergun with ice from Nheelun. The protesters are condemning the damage to Cheergun's ecosystem as a result of such actions (on top of the destruction already ongoing) and voice fears about the effect of colliding ice meteors with Bhruusil.

The messages carry the distinctive Grid traces of the Twelve Ducks, but that radical organization denies that it posted them. What's going on? The more paranoid among the student activists and the Concord are speculating that VoidCorp is setting up the Twelve Ducks to discredit their legitimate protests down the line. The more level-headed individuals explain it as a Grid prank or the work of a more radical group hoping to supplant the Ducks.

THE DRETH PRESENCE

The New Dreth Commonwealth and Insight are nearing an agreement that may have an impact on Bhruusil's land-based defenses in the near future. In December 2501, representatives from both nations met at an undisclosed location for a week of intensive diplomatic negotiations. The primary topic of the talks was the status of Dreths living in Insight space.

The New Dreth Commonwealth, based in the Dewi system, claims to be the legitimate government and political heir to the now-defunct Dreth Commonwealth, destroyed by its erstwhile ally VoidCorp in GW2. Dreth territory was located in the region of space that now includes Insight territory. Insight was the second stellar nation, after the Galactic Concord, to recognize the successor nation to the Dreth Commonwealth, a move that surprised many political analysts considering the sovereignty issue over former Dreth space. Many of these analysts concede that Dreth assistance was likely key to Insight's independence; Dreth commandos made strikes against key C3I (command, control, communication, and intelligence) sites during the secession. Even VoidCorp admits that Dreth terrorists committed "numerous criminal acts of sabotage, assassination, and theft" in support of Insight's treachery.

Many of the issues surrounding the disposition of the Dreth in Insight space are nearing an agreement. Dreth demands that ethnic Dreth in Insight space be given the opportunity to emigrate to the Verge has met with surprisingly little resistance from Insight. Once the New Dreth negotiators withdrew their demand that Insight financially assist ethnic Dreth, Insight resistance evaporated.

What has resulted is little more than a token agreement, since Insight has to do little more than allow free emigration. As this has been an Insight legal policy from its inception, Insight does not appreciably lose any more than it might have already. Still, the agreement, should it be signed, symbolizes to other stellar powers the two nations' willingness to put aside their individual interests in favor of an alliance beneficial to both.

If the agreement is signed, it will mean an exchange of assets in the Verge. The New Dreth Commonwealth will gain much-needed computer system upgrades and communication infrastructure development, and Insight will see the addition of a company of Dreth light infantry on its Bhruusil colony in the Karnath system. Dreth light infantry has a reputation for skill and toughness. They will serve principally as cadre in the development of a militia on Bhruusil.

For all of the science of humanity and the species it has befriended, it's alarming that a system like Eldala was overlooked for more than a century. It's not as if explorers didn't have a chance—a good chance—to find what the system contained. With a G0 star and detectable planets, Eldala presented an obvious target for humanity. Records indicate that a dozen scouting routes passed by the system. A few were lost thanks to technical problems, but most returned with a dry report of a star with three planets, including a single unremarkable cool terran world. None of the surveys reported any exploitable resources. Even the most recent survey, less than a year old, cataloged by a human freelancer and her weren companion, made no mention of anything especially noteworthy in the system. In the quest for habitable worlds and strategic minerals and ores, Eldala was shunted aside as uninteresting. How wrong they were.

Orbiting Eldala system are three planets: two unremarkable Jovian worlds, and the Class 1 planet Danwell. All previous records to the contrary, it's nowhere near frigid enough to deter a visit or even a colony. The equatorial regions present no obstacle to human life. Men and women have fought and died for lesser worlds.

As if that weren't enough, Danwell has inhabitants, a full biosphere of plant and animal life. Finally, and more fascinating than all the rest, a previously unknown sentient species dwells on its plains and in its forests, mountains, and hills. The edanweir, they call themselves.

HISTORY

The history of the system falls into two segments: pre-contact and post-contact. In March, a survey team contracted to the Concord Survey Service came to Eldala. Unlike all their predecessors, this team discovered a Danwell different from what previous surveyors saw. Led by a former Concord Marine who left the service under questionable circumstances, this team descended to a spot near a wondrous sight: a 3-kilometer-high

waterfall. It was while he and his partner were admiring the breathtaking view that they first made contact with the edanweir. The rest of the galaxy wasn't far behind this Gabriel Connor. Less than a week later, the Concord arrived in force, following their wayward agent.

That moment represents a nexus of time for both parties. Ignorant of each other prior to then, after that day nothing would be the same for the edanweir. Exposed to a larger galactic society, their lives had irrevocably changed. And for humanity, meeting another intelligent species, with whom it is possible to communicate and share experiences, is its own reward among the lonely and often unfriendly stars.

Now Concord explorers and first-contact specialists have the chance to explore the mysterious history of Danwell and its people. Admittedly, their interest is not purely selfless. The Concord wants to know about what the edanweir call the "Others." Described as a hostile, domineering species, they pose a threat to humanity as surely as they do to the edanweir. Some Concord xenologists believe these Others are a race that the people of the Verge have already encountered, to their sorrow.

So much remains undecided about what will come of the system and its inhabitants. And the work of coming to know and work with the edanweir has only begun. As Lorand Kharls, the first Administrator to visit Danwell, said so delicately, "We and the edanweir have agreed to go out on another date, but no one's talking marriage just yet. Let's worry about getting through tomorrow first."

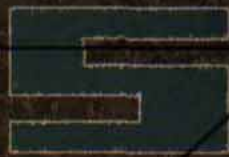
THE EDANWEIR

Discovering a species in the midst of a developing culture is a rare and rewarding experience. Like that of the weren, the civilization of the edanweir is on the rise but has not yet reached to the sky on atomic flame. Given the rate at which species develop, the odds of catching one during that narrow window are vanishingly small.

Humanity owes its good fortune to a unique quality of the edanweir (singular edanwe): their inability to tolerate large concentrations of their own species.

CHAPTER

ELDALA



Edanwe Game Data

NOTE: These statistics reflect a nonprofessional edanwe hunter living and working in one of Danwell's villages. Just as with humans, most edanweir are not hero-class characters.

STR 9 (2d4+4) INT 9 (2d6+2)
DEX 11 (2d4+6) WIL 10 (3d4+2)
CON 8 (2d4+3) PER 8 (d8+3)
Durability: 8/8/4/4 Action check: 11+/10/5/2
Move: Run 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Marginal/1
Psionic energy points: 4

Attacks

Unarmed¹ 9/4/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O
Rifle² 12/6/3 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m HI/O

¹+d4 base situation die

²Treat the edanweir muskets as the .30 bolt rifle described in Chapter 9: Weapons and Armor in the Player's Handbook.

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
+2 resistance modifier vs. psionic attacks
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [9], Unarmed Attack [9], Modern [11]—*rifle* [12], Movement [8], Survival [8], Knowledge [9], Awareness [10]—*perception* [12], Resolve [10]—*mental* [11], Investigate [10]—*track* [12], Interaction [8], Telepathy [8]—*contact* [10].

Urbanization, typically a friend of progress, is the bane of the edanweir; every time the people of Danwell have attempted to come together in city or town, something collapses in the collective psyche, which breaks down into

Edanwe Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I
Environment: Class 1
GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2
Biome: Temperate and equatorial zones
Encounter Chance: Unlikely
Group Size: 1–6 (d6)
Organization: Communal hierarchy
Niche: Advanced hunter
Intelligence: Telepathic sentient

savagery and violence. The ancient tales of such strife are repeated on traditional occasions beside ornate fireplaces.

Nobody's Playthings

"Teddybears!" cried one of the first Concordans to meet the edanweir. While referring to a fellow sentient as a human child's doll is thoughtless and impolitic, it's understandable. Barely a meter and a half tall, a typical edanwe is a humanoid whose body is covered with plush, russet-red fur. Only the five fingers, two opposable thumbs, and palm of each hand have exposed skin. The bushy tail, usually striped with red and white, reaches anywhere from .3 to .7 meters in length. It's not especially dextrous; the edanweir work with their nimble hands.

Thinner fur of pale white or cream covers the edanwe's face except for the muzzle, which is dark red; the facial fur darkens with age. An edanwe's face is marked with stripes that roughly correspond to the location of eyebrows on a human, though their ability to convey expression is limited. The lips are thin and often fail to conceal sharp white teeth—the edanweir enjoy a mostly carnivorous diet. Small, mobile round ears perk up on either side of the head. The bright, curious eyes are especially keen; edanweir gain a –1 step bonus in any Awareness check involving vision.

The edanweir are not naturally trusting or open people.

TABLE 7: ELDALA SYSTEM

	Danwell	Tavkath	Rivel
Primary	Eldala	Eldala	Eldala
Planetary Class	Class 1	Class 5	Class 5
Gravity	G2 (0.85 g)	G2 (0.94 g)	G2 (1.07 g)
Radiation	R1 (2 rem/year)	R3 (16 rem/day)	R3 (11 rem/wk)
Atmosphere	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)
Pressure	P3 (0.9 atm)	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)
Heat	H2 (5° C)	H1 (–157° C)	H0 (–200° C)
Orbital Distance	1.20 AU	4.06 AU	9.62 AU
Diameter	11,053 km	57,600 km	56,200 km
Year	457.8 days	7.79 years	28.44 years
Day	28.2 hours	20.4 hours	13.2 hours
Axial Tilt	34.5°	9.1°	48.1°
Density	0.98	0.21	0.29
# Satellites	2	22	8



THE DOOM OF KLALIALE AN EDANWE LEGEND

On Songmeet Day, the midwinter festival, villages gather in the longhouses to celebrate the community. It's a time for feasting, music, and storytelling, when the edanweir give thanks for prosperity and remember the dark past. Traditional tales are recited on this day to reinforce the lessons of history—and folly.

Klaliale was the elder of a prosperous village, long before the secret of black powder, when edanweir still hunted kitiete with spear and bow. The kitiete were plentiful and fat, and Klaliale's village grew with each passing year. So many were they that not one, but two seers were born there, and Klaliale took this as a sign of favor from the Powers.

Even then the warnings of the Powers had long been sung around the fires, the madness in trying to touch the ends of the world. But Klaliale in his pride forgot the ancient songs and invited his neighbors to join the blessings of his village. He showed them larders bursting with meat, and kitiete hides enough to clothe and shelter five times his people's number. The valley where he lived was wide and warm, the winters gentle, his people plump and at peace.

Klaliale's sweet words persuaded his neighbors, and their elders convinced their people that the ancient peril had passed, that surely the Powers meant for the community to grow and thrive together. And so they brought their villages to the wide valley, built new houses, and joined their heartsongs with their prosperous neighbors.

Klaliale's heart was closed to the warnings of the seers, who reminded him of the Powers and sang of the downfall of pride in fearful notes. He pointed to the crowded, bustling valley and its happy people. "Surely," he said, "the Powers only warned us against taxing the prosperity of the land. They never meant for us to stay fragmented across the world."

But as the days passed, the heartsong grew more strident and its music grated in the thoughts. There were harsh words, disputes over small things, and then over large ones. A hunting party fought over its kills, a child turned against her mother, the guardians aimed their guns at one another. And then the kitiete left. The winter cold came down, more harsh than any in memory. The seers sang in tears of the Powers' wrath, and Klaliale in his fury struck one down. The child died at his hand.

With that the song broke. Hand and gun were raised by neighbor against neighbor, and blood flowed like the Downfall through the valley of Klaliale. And at the end there was only Klaliale with the reproachful song of the dying seer echoing in his heart and his dead people piled like the snow around him. Then the winter fell upon him.

They range around their villages but have little contact with other settlements beyond occasional radio transmissions. They enjoy their privacy, and they're quick to defend it. More than half of the population are armed with guns.

A SHORT LIFE

Life expectancy for edanweir hovers near sixty years under the best conditions. Most edanweir don't reach that ancient age, having succumbed either to some accident or any of a number of natural causes. Adolescence ends around age twelve, but an edanwe isn't thought of as fully mature before he or she reaches nineteen years of age. Edanweir are considered middle-aged at thirty or so and old ten years after that, though with modern medicine and antiaging gene treatments, Concord doctors hope to double or even triple life expectancies.

Edanweir generally mate for life, usually not before the age of twenty. It's rare for a bereaved edanwe to take a second partner, although not unheard of. Six months after conception, the female edanwe gives birth to one or two children. Despite the fur, edanweir are not mammalian; they must nourish their young with ground-up meats and

Edanweir as Heroes

You may allow players to creature edanweir heroes at your discretion. An edanwe hero can choose from any profession other than Mindwalker, though he or she is a psionic talent with the Telepathy—*contact* skill. Free broad skills for the edanweir are Athletics, Movement, Knowledge, Awareness, Resolve, and Interaction.

Because of their small size, edanweir must have e-suits, armor, and other such equipment custom-built, doubling the cost of any such item. It's possible that, with a little tailoring, they could squeeze into clothing or equipment meant for t'sa.

Edanweir heroes must observe the following Ability Score minimums and maximums:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIL	PER
4/13	6/15	4/13	4/14	8/14	4/12

Edanweir begin with no familiarity with 26th-century technology (for example, Vehicle Operation—*space* or Computer Science), but can quickly learn such advanced skills any time after hero creation.

To find edanweir on the interstellar scene would be remarkable; only very special individuals choose to venture from Eldala. Curious though they may be, Danwell is all the edanweir have ever known and most remain psychologically unprepared to give it up. Edanweir heroes must abide by the restrictions of their species, including the psychological effects of large crowds and, paradoxically, loneliness. They would have to endure being pointed out as bizarre, cute, or even frightening.

EDANWEIR BONDING

Though they no longer even pause to consider that part of their psyche, edanweir naturally tend to bond. They form strong psionic links—especially to one other individual—and this connection is what frustrates linguists hoping to learn the edanwe tongue. Edanweir have a rudimentary phonetic language, but at least half of any conversation is telepathic. Isolation is devastating as a result, akin to a human losing both hearing and sight. Other than this psychic connection, the edanweir have no special talent for mindwalking, although Concord Mindwalkers believe that the ability is latent within them as much as among other sentients.

Those fantastic mental bonds are disastrous when an edanwe is immersed in a mass of his or her own kind. The individual is pulled apart by so many conflicting connections, and the fabric of the community is shredded. Suddenly the spoken language, which the edanweir never needed or fully developed, is the only communication tool available. To disappear this way from the community, even while surrounded by its erstwhile and likewise exiled members, is demonically frustrating. Ultimately, it sparks madness and violence.

If an edanwe is exposed to either isolation or crowding, he or she must make a successful *Resolve—mental resolve* skill check each day to prevent the onset of ill effects, with bonuses or penalties depending on the severity of the conditions. The change in behavior isn't sudden, but it will grow worse the longer the edanwe remains in the harmful situation.

Lately there have been unconfirmed but alarming suggestions that some humans with no previously demonstrated talent for mindwalking have been able to join this mental community after lengthy association with edanweir. With the Gamemaster's permission, a non-mindwalking hero who spends more than a week among the edanweir may make *Resolve—mental resolve* skill checks each week after the first. A successful result indicates he or she has joined the edanweir psychic community—with all the positive and negative effects noted above.

The Concord denies the possibility but has nevertheless whisked away those few who claim to suddenly understand the edanwe language, perhaps for xenolinguistic study, perhaps for a more sinister reason. No one can say whether two humans could share thoughts after bonding with the edanweir this way, but the potential is unnerving. Who knows what would happen if this power could spread through humanity?

roots. For their primitive ancestors, this meant prechewing their children's food, but modern households contain appropriate food-preparation implements.

THE ART OF LIVING

Edanweir seem driven to embellish their environment. Everything from the most mundane tool to the communal longhouse is ornately carven, painted, or stitched with decorative patterns drawn from nature: leaves, flowers, animal forms. Even their black-powder rifles, powerful weapons used for both hunting and defense, sport wooden stocks inlaid with delicate carving. Their usual garment is an embroidered vest of bright and varied colors.

Central to the livelihood of the edanweir are the huge, semibovine beasts called *kitiete*. As the caribou and buffalo were to Old Earth's nomadic hunters, so too the *kitiete* provide nearly all the edanweir's needs: meat for food, hides for shelter and clothing, bone and horn for tools. The first day of each year's hunting season, *Lifesong*, is dedicated to the beast, with dramatic performances and gay decorations around the villages. This is also the traditional date for lovers to pledge themselves to each other.

CULTURE CLASH

The outcome of a chance meeting with a group of edanweir is unpredictable. Many edanweir remain ignorant of the presence of aliens on their world and so react with alarm to the

intruders. Concord surveyors traveling over Danwell have reported a few outright hostile encounters, punctuated by rifle fire, followed by their own quick retreat. The elders promise that will change as more and more edanwe villages hear and come to believe the radio messages about the new visitors.

Among those edanweir who have heard the news, the strangers can expect a less violent reception, yet few welcome them with open arms into their homes. The only outsiders the edanweir have ever known are the vile Others (see below), and now the Concord must work to efface the ill will generated by Danwell's previous "guests"; humanity has yet to prove itself. Some Concordan ambassadors to Danwell blame this complicated situation on the same ex-Marine who first met the edanweir and involved them in his personal conflicts with other humans.

MORE THAN WORDS

Another, more fundamental problem in dealing with the edanweir is the communications barrier. Learning the phonemes and structures of the edanwe language is the challenge of a lifetime for the five xenolinguists the Concord brought to Danwell. Progress so far has been depressingly slow, but everyone's hopeful that mere words won't be an obstacle to friendship. Still, the realization is growing that edanwe communication goes beyond the spoken word.

In the meantime, visitors have learned some important rules of edanwe body language. The sideways swish of an edanwe's tail indicates a negative response—like a shake of

a human head—and the faster the tail thrashes, the more intense the emotion. An affirmative response is signified by a twitch of the tail. Visitors without tails have learned to mimic these gestures with an arm behind the back.

When meeting and parting, edanweir bow slightly, extending one hand to the ground and covering the mouth with the other, while keeping the tail visible. This gesture is rather more difficult for the tailless to imitate, and their attempts sometimes causes the edanweir to break into loud hissing. But alarming as the sound is to newcomers, it's nothing to be afraid of—only edanwe laughter.

COMMUNAL ISOLATION

Edanweir are latent telepaths, continually in contact with one another (see "Edanweir Bonding" above), and find true solitude a horrid state. They pity (and don't really understand) sentients who spend their existence alone. For edanweir, being "in community" is more than just comforting—it's essential to survival. Forced isolation usually results in the edanwe's suicide. Even the worst offenders against edanwe law or custom, whether of their own species or another, are never left alone. Death is far kinder.

Yet despite their need to share their existence with others, edanweir can't endure the press of bodies and minds that comes with a large crowd. Instead of the melancholy

of loneliness that leads to self-destruction, crowding pushes edanweir into a furious rage. The limit is different for each edanwe; some can tolerate the proximity of several hundred, others no more than fifty or so. On average, the population of an edanwe settlement numbers a hundred or fewer.

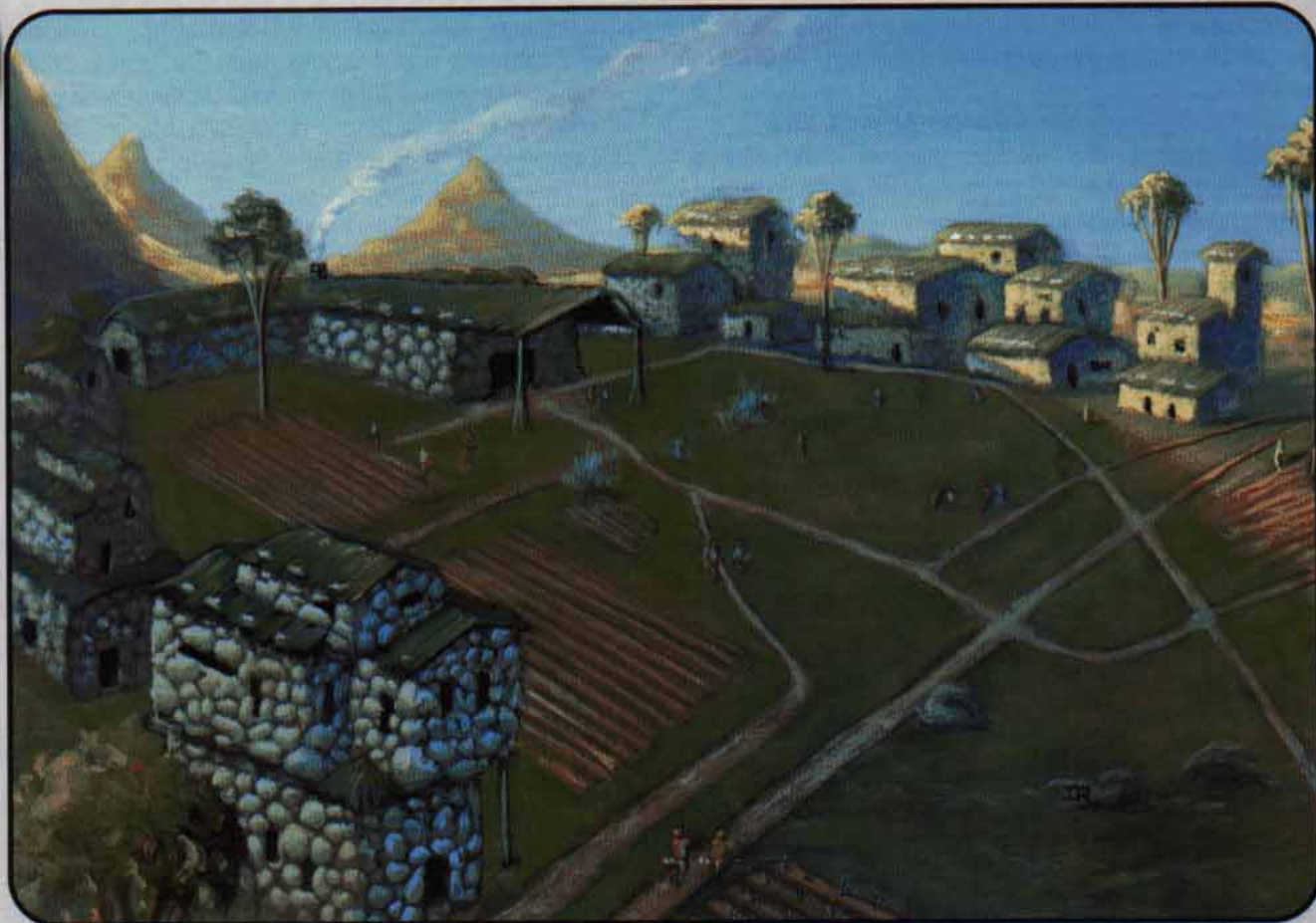
One phenomenon can't be explained by Concord scientists: Edanweir have reported no effect from spending many days aboard a Concord cruiser, surrounded by more than a thousand humans. The prevalent theory is that the telepathic link is far weaker between edanweir and other species than within their own.

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

This psychological limitation splits edanweir society into widely separated villages linked only by the surge of radio waves. But beyond this is the overriding community, the "world-village," which follows a simple communist system. While the edanweir respect one another's boundaries and privacy, the fruits of their labor are available to everyone. That includes everything from guns to food to lumber, with airships transporting needed supplies between villages. Only a few special items, such as the rare radios and airships, are reserved for the elders' use.

Occasionally edanweir travel from village to village in planned gatherings or seasonal festivals that last a few days.





For the most part, though, travel over Danwell is restricted to elders who have survived their fiftieth winter (the Eldest) and have advice to give in times of need. Travel between villages also spreads concepts between the communities, linking the people in a way that mere radio transmissions cannot.

PAIRING OFF

It's been well established through observation that the unique edanweir bonding is strongest in pairs. The bond has been observed between hunting partners and childhood friends. Very rarely, it even crosses genetic barriers and links individuals of different species. But most often the strongest bonds are formed in mated couples.

A month ago, a few privileged Concordans, including Administrator Steven Hood, had the honor of witnessing an edanweir wedding. Unlike the elaborate marriage rites of many sentients, this was a small function with no obvious religious trappings. Only a dozen guests appeared, including one of the Eldest, who conducted the brief ceremony. At its conclusion, the couple ritually touched brows and twined tails in a physical demonstration of their psychic pairing. Then, without further ado, the furry humanoids dashed off to a private location outside the village. An elder informed Hood that they would return a few days later, at which time there would be a community feast in celebration of the children to come.

INVASION

The community of the edanweir's psionic link is first and foremost a consensual one. While no one is ever left alone, forcing one's way into another's mind is not tolerated. To the edanweir, such an intrusion is far more serious than barging into a home uninvited; it is a violation so fundamental to be obscene.

The edanweir word is *mewesh*, "defilement," and it dates back to the fearful time of the Others' appearance on Danwell. The mysterious externals mindwalked into the entire population, not only harvesting the most private thoughts but forcing their own alien objectives on the helpless edanweir. Their invasion transformed the community into something vile, and the resulting psychological damage drove many edanweir mad.

Mewesh is one of the few capital crimes under the edanweir's straightforward legal system; anyone practicing the defilement is killed immediately. Thus, the Concord requires any Mindwalkers visiting Danwell to swear an oath that they will not engage in any form of uninvited mental contact with edanweir. Anyone violating that stricture is subject to Danwell's justice, with no appeal possible.

THE EYES OF THE ANCIENTS

As much as the edanweir respect their elders, they save their humblest reverence for the child-seers, called the

mahlahnwe'ir yahein. There are always two or three born in each generation, and they're quickly spotted during childhood. These children have gifts of prophecy and postcognition that are very intense in early childhood and fade as the seers grow older, vanishing by age twenty. They guide community decisions, offer advice to the elders, and sometimes reveal solutions to urgent problems. More channelers of the edanweir collective will than true Mindwalkers, the *mahlahnwe'ir yahein* apparently draw their power from the clarity of childlike innocence. When not exercising their talents, they are normal children in every way, exhibiting no more special wisdom than any of their playmates.

Gabriel Connor was the first human to experience the power of one of these seers, who judged him and his companions on their arrival at Danwell. Barely five years old, the child conveyed an ancient sentence and certainty of purpose. Concord Administrator Hood also came under her scrutiny shortly after being assigned here; fortunately for the Concord delegation, he too was found satisfactory (or at least not lacking). As a matter of course, any first-contact team on the surface is brought before one of the seers. The edanweir have suffered too much in the past to blindly trust anyone.

DANWELL

It may not be perfect, but it's as good as humanity can wish for in a region already crowded with more than its share of Class 1 worlds. Each discovery of another one gives humanity a place to go, a new place to call home. And there's plenty of room; with estimates holding the edanweir population under one million total, the landmasses of Danwell could hold five hundred times that number of humans and the edanweir might never know that they were there.

Early surveys reported the first planet of Eldala to be an arctic world. As it turns out, that depiction doesn't stand up in the face of facts known today; the average temperature of Danwell is about 13° C warmer than earlier catalogues indicated. Even so, Danwell isn't warm by any stretch; the southern polar ice cap currently stretches over a quarter of the planet, but is slowly beginning to shrink with the passage of seasons. Over the next 200 days, the north pole will stretch over for its winter. With the more extreme axial tilt, Danwell's winters are severe. Although the ambient temperature of Danwell is about 5° C, the winters are considerably colder. Unverified local legend holds that about one winter in a hundred is so cold that the Downfall freezes solid. Within about 30° latitude of the poles, it would be difficult to survive a winter without special precautions. Only near the equator can life survive year round.

Five landmasses carve up the planet, divided by ridges, long chains of snowcapped mountains, and a few valleys—chasms, really—that extend for thousands of kilometers. Along such deep basins the greatest reservoirs of water on the planet can be found. Otherwise, it's fairly dry, with land

accounting for some 81% of the planet's surface area. There are no oceans on Danwell to separate one continent from another, only lakes, rivers, and a few inland seas. In this place, it's a miracle that fauna ever developed in the small seas—apparently just long enough to move over to the ample dry regions.

Thankfully, the planet's high mountain chains—created as a result of geologic force and slightly low gravity—help to keep water recycling through the biosphere of Danwell. Rain is common—snow even more so. Runoff from the melting snow and ice provides much of the movement for the natural recycling of water. Without it, the thousands of plant and animal species on Danwell would quickly die.

Flora fill ecological niches not unfamiliar to those found on Earth and many worlds. Trees line many areas, and the light gravity would seem to make it easier for giant specimens to grow. But heavy snowfall encourages squat trees, well built to weather long periods of cold. Other plants adapt by shedding their seeds and waiting for the coming year to sprout anew.

The animal species aren't quite so fortunate. The most common tactic of animals involves migration, whether it's of the mammalian flyers that streak and soar or the rodents that crawl across the ground on six legs. Other creatures resort to hibernation. Still another group, most of them cold-blooded reptiles, has adapted to the cold with admirable skill, managing to forage for just enough food to survive long winter nights.

DANWELL POPULATION 878 SENTIENTS

Human 94%

Orion	0%	Austrin	1%
Thuldan	0%	Nariac	0%
Orlamu	0%	Insight	1%
Rigunmor	0%	Hatire	0%
Solar	1%	Borealin	1%
VoidCorp	1%	StarMech	1%
Independent	3%	Concord	91%

Alien 6%

Sesheyan	0%	T'sa	74%
Mechalus	7%	Weren	11%
Fraal	8%	Other	*

Administrator Hood hopes to commence a census of edanweir as soon as possible. Educated guesses place their population somewhere between three and four hundred thousand, divided among many tiny villages. Hood is concerned about the relatively low population count; among any other sentient, the edanweir would have to be considered an endangered species. Meanwhile, while all the Concordans agree the census should be done, no one has volunteered to trek over frozen ground to do it.

KITIETE GAME DATA

STR 18 (2d4+13) INT 4 (Animal 7 or d4+5)
 DEX 7 (d4+5) WIL 8 (d4+6)
 CON 12 (2d4+7) PER 4 (Animal 10 or d4+8)
 Durability: 12/12/6/6 Action check: 10+/9/4/2
 Move: sprint 38, run 26, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Marginal/1 Last resorts: 0

Attacks

Charge 16/8/4 d8+2s/d6+2w/d8+2w LI/G
 Trample 16/8/4 d8s/d6w/d6+2w LI/O

Defenses

Armor: d6 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Movement (12)-*race* (14), *swim* (13); Stamina (12)-*endurance* (16), *resist pain* (14); Awareness (8)-*intuition* (10), *perception* (9); Resolve (8)-*physical resolve* (10).

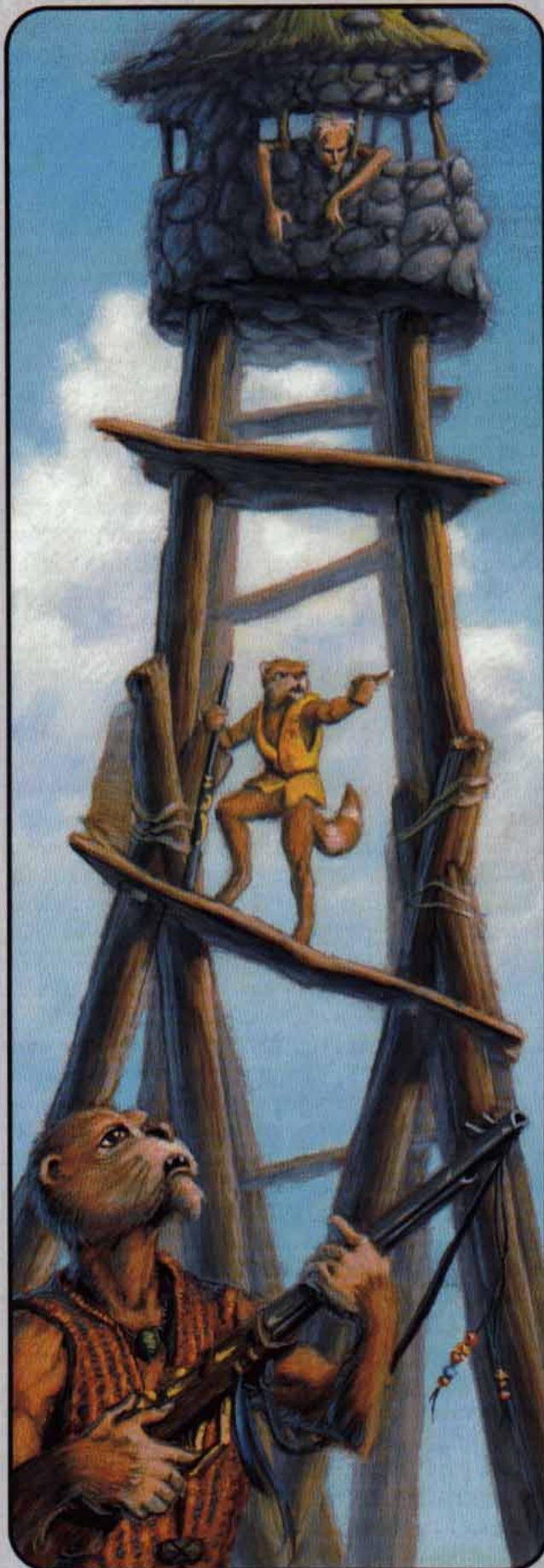
KITIETE ECOLOGICAL DATA

Biochemistry: Series I
 Environment: Class 1
 GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2
 Biome: Temperate and equatorial zones
 Encounter Chance: Possible
 Group Size: 6-20 (2d8+4)
 Niche: Large herbivore
 Intelligence: High-order animal

The kitiете deserve special mention. While herbivores, these ill-tempered giants have already claimed a few human lives—and uncounted edanweir. The edanweir hunt the six-legged bovine creatures for food and hide. Humans find kitiете sweet to the taste—at least until it's heavily salted in edanweir meat larders. The edanweir have learned well how to hunt the kitiете, able to bring one down at 300 meters with their exquisite rifles. Since a kitiете is able to charge such a distance in under a minute, only experienced hunters go after such game, as their first shots usually bring one down. Those horns and hooves are nothing to be trifled with.

VILLAGE OF THE FALLS

The edanwe settlement nearest the Downfall, called the Village of the Falls by the Concord, is little more than a hunting camp. Despite its small population, it has served as the principal point of contact between the Concord and the edanweir. The village is located only a few kilometers from the Downfall itself. Also nearby is a flat area of rock where



small ships can land without affecting the local environment. There are usually one or two Concord shuttles parked there, but few other ships.

The central building of the village is the village hall. Nearly every activity important to the edanwe community happens here. It is where they celebrate, discuss community affairs, and, more importantly to the Concord, where they meet with the offworlders. Representatives from other villages come here as well to meet with the strangers. Simply coordinating all this activity has added unforeseen challenges to the lives of this tiny community, but the edanweir have coped with it well thus far. Near the village hall is a small ring of stones that mark a landing area for the airships, wondrous inventions provided in part by the Others but perfected by the edanweir. These airships usually bear the representatives of other edanwe communities. While human visitors have found the inventions fascinating, the weren consider them marvels of engineering; they prize the craftsmanship and patient effort that went into making them.

The area around the village is covered with woods and meadow. The forest varies in thickness from moderate to dense. Also nearby is a stream that runs into the river that forms the Downfall. This stream provides the village's principal water source.

The village is ruled by an older edanwe referred to simply as "Eldest." This person is assisted by several other edanweir who act as advisors. For important matters that affect the entire community, the edanweir of the village gather together in the village hall to discuss their options and decide a course of action. The Eldest remains an important figure, though, with the power to decide for the village in most matters.

The Village of the Falls receives frequent visits from the *mahlahnwe'ir yahein*, largely because of the concentration of outsiders there. Concord xenologists and first-contact specialists have not yet determined exactly what questions the seers are called upon to answer. As they learn more of their new acquaintances, they hope to discover answers about the nature of the *mahlahnwe'ir yahein*, especially as regards their strange connection to the ruins scattered around the planet.

The village also has access to a long-distance radio transmitter. This high-frequency (HF) system is one of the few positive legacies of the arrival of the Others. With this, the edanweir are able to maintain contact with other communities on Danwell. This has helped them resolve disputes, aid one another through difficult seasons, and share in a larger community without the risks associated with such attempts in the past.

THE CONCORD CHANCERY

The Galactic Concord has established a small base on Danwell near the Village of the Falls. It can accommodate up to fifty people, but it rarely holds more than twenty or so.

TLELAI EDANWE HUNTER & AMBASSADOR

Level 9 edanwe Free Agent

STR 9	(0)	INT 9	(0)
DEX 12	(+1)	WIL 12	(+1)
CON 10		PER 9	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	

Attacks

Rifle	16/8/4	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	HI/O
Unarmed	11/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. encounter skills (WIL)
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [9]; Melee Weapons [9]; Unarmed [9]-*brawl* [11]; Primitive [12]-*flintlock* [16]; Movement [10]-*trail-blazing* [14]; Stamina [10]-*endurance* [12]; Knowledge [9]; Awareness [12]-*intuition* [15], *perception* [15]; Resolve [12]-*mental* [14], *physical* [14]; Interaction [9].

Concord Administrator Hood has done his best to set certain edanweir into specific roles. Tlelai has become the day-to-day liaison between the Galactic Concord and the edanweir of the Village. For important matters, Tlelai consults the Eldest. But Hood finds himself intimidated and uncomfortable around the Eldest, and thus he encouraged the friendlier Tlelai to handle things. He can ask Tlelai questions with less fear of giving offense—if Tlelai can manage to comprehend the human speech.

Tlelai has a formidable tolerance for the quirks and strangeness of humanity, but he doesn't believe that his people ceded their place, their rights, the moment that humans arrived. He walks out of many meetings with Hood without much of an explanation.

Tlelai misses the one human friend he's had, but he accepts his responsibility to support the community. Last season, he wanted nothing more than the respect that comes from years of veteran hunting and providing for the village. Now, the burden of a new leadership falls on his shoulders, and he doesn't like it. He doesn't like spending so much time among humans, t'sa, or fraal, and he hasn't had the time to use his rifle as a hunter since Gabriel Connor came to Danwell.

Tlelai is one of few edanweir to agree to physical and medical scans. Using his profile, Concord doctors hope to improve their knowledge of the entire species.

It is located near the flat rocky area where small ships land. The senior Concord representative, Field Administrator Steven Hood (Hm/Concord/DFA-3), has his office here. Supporting him are several xenologists, linguists, and contact specialists. Two of these specialists are Mindwalkers, who have helped immeasurably in establishing communication between the Concord and the edanweir, once they understood the ground rules. There are only four marines attached to the base: a lieutenant, a corporal, and two troopers. They were chosen as much for their diplomatic skills as they were for their military talents. At the Administrator's orders, they do not wear their heavy armor or bear any weapons but a sidearm.

Of principal importance to the Concord is maintaining friendly ties with the edanwe hunter Tlelai. It was with some bitterness that Administrator Hood discovered that Tlelai brought "into community" the criminal Gabriel Connor. Since that time, though, he has come to trust Tlelai's judgment, even hampered as it is by the communication barriers. Hood views Tlelai as a decent, honorable person, and begins to wonder if the Concord has made a mistake in its judgment of Connor. This attitude is underscored by Connor's complete acceptance by the young *mahlahnwe'ir yahein*.

Tlelai acts as the principal liaison between the Concord and the edanweir. As Concord linguists improve their understanding of edanwe communication, Hood hopes to learn more about the edanweir themselves. He also has his orders to discover what he can about both the Others and the ancient people whose artifacts remain behind. Tlelai is less able to learn how to communicate with the "hyumans" and is often frustrated by his unwanted position as liaison.

THE DOWNFALL

Rightfully described as one of the most breathtaking natural wonders in all of the Verge, the Downfall represents well the beauty of Danwell. The Downfall is a waterfall that reaches 3 kilometers in height. If a crew knows where to look, it is visible from low orbit. But to truly see the Downfall, a visitor must make the trek from the edanwe village nearby and see it up close. The waters of an inland sea plummet off the edge of a great plateau and disperse into mist below. The riverbed beneath the falls is completely obscured by the mist. The roar of the waters is deafening, almost drowning out even thought.

Some of the human visitors who have come to see the Downfall have expressed regret that this may one day become a tourist area. Some among them wish to take steps to preserve its pristine majesty. In this they are supported by the edanweir, although for different reasons. The edanweir who make their homes nearby have an old ritual wherein those among them nearing natural death make a final trek to the waters upstream of the Downfall and swim out to midriver, allowing the current to take

them over the edge. In so doing, they free the community of any responsibility to care for them through harsh winters, when there is little enough food to go around.

THE RELICS

In addition to its interest in the edanweir themselves, the Concord also has an interest in exploring and understanding the race who left behind the triangular buildings scattered across Danwell. They believe them to be remnants of the Glassmakers, a people who left similar ruins on High Mojave, in nearby Mantebron. So far, they have been frustrated by their attempts to unlock further the mystery of their existence on Danwell. About the only thing they have discovered about these ruins is that they still possess tremendous power, which seems based principally on light.

The Concord has had little success in examining any of the twenty-eight buildings they have discovered on Danwell. The material they are constructed from has proven resistant to any attempts to penetrate it. Concord scientists are aware they must possess some sort of key, but they've no idea where they might find one. Administrator Lorand Kharls is aware that Gabriel Connor possesses one, but so far has not chosen to share this with the researchers searching the sites on Danwell.

One thing that puzzles these scholars is the seeming connection between these sites and the edanweir. They have not amassed anywhere near enough data to explain this apparent relationship, but they hope to understand how to communicate with the edanweir in part to answer some of their questions. Many of them feel they are on the verge of a breakthrough discovery, one that will have great implications, and they are frustrated by delays.

TAVKATH

Swirling within the turbulent skies of this gas giant is a wealth of gases not typically found in any quantity, especially argon, which finds use in lasers and as a blanket for the production of titanium and other reactive elements. Still, coming all the way to Eldala's Tavkath doesn't seem to make much economic sense.

Unless, that is, one represents the voracious resource appetite of VoidCorp. A commercial frigate, VCT FF95023 (*Lost Shipment*), running silent, orbits Tavkath as it sends down probes, drones and prospecting robots. The frigate's captain, PF921 91NOB (Vilhelm Falcig), has quietly gone about his business and done nothing to provoke a Concordan reaction.

Privately, PF921 knows that even VoidCorp wouldn't put much stock in the argon. That's just a nice bonus. The real victory would be getting some recognition of a VoidCorp claim to Tavkath. Then they'd have the pretext to bring in a few more ships, some construction equipment, and the necessary support personnel. Things could go quietly for a

while, until some convenient—if necessary, manufactured—emergency pulls the Concord's cruisers out of Eldala.

That day, PF921 could seize the dream that hovers on the mind of every ambitious VoidCorp manager when they first heard of the edanweir. Sometime when the Concord isn't looking, they can send down a negotiations team to Danwell and repeat history's sesheyan success story.

RIVEL

Tavkath's distant cousin, almost twin in size, Rivel hasn't attracted even a pretext of interest. About the only thing Rivel's used for locally is as a navigation beacon for those arriving near the edge of the system. Little or no exploration of the gas giant and its environment has been undertaken yet.

STELLAR RELATIONS

"This people's culture, all the slow lovely things they do, the guns they don't use on one another, the airships they never thought of arming, the community . . . it'll be gone too, a precious thing changed forever."

— Gabriel Connor, March 2502

The only relationship established with any of the stellar nations is the tenuous one between some of the edanweir and the Concord. Thus far, the Concord has declared the system quarantined to any but Concord vessels and personnel. At last count, there are just under 200 Concord people here, mostly contact specialists, linguists, and archaeologists.

A relatively junior Administrator, Steven Hood, is officially in charge of the assets the Concord has left behind, although in practice he has little day-to-day authority over the military commanders that enforce the quarantine. Administrator Hood's background is well-suited to his assignment. Although young, he has not only acquired law credentials, but has both education and experience in diplomatic negotiations. This has been very helpful in the fulfillment of his responsibilities. The edanweir have come to respect him as a quiet, calm man who thinks before he speaks. They do not understand his reluctance to deal directly with the Eldest, but respect his wishes.

To Hood's credit, he seeks to learn as much as he can about the edanweir before opening any formal relations with their leadership. Until then, he prefers to avoid causing any gaffe where it might cause irrevocable harm. He is aware that Administrator Kharls has entrusted him with a great responsibility, one better suited, perhaps, to a more senior official. He wants to represent the Concord well in its relationship with the people of Danwell.

Within the system, the Concord has a single cruiser, which acts as the flagship for a squadron of smaller craft that enforce the quarantine. The cruiser is commanded by

Commander (Wm/Concord/DTO-14), a weren experienced in naval tactics. Commander Tavik has served the Concord since shortly after its inception.

Unfortunately, the Concord's representatives have learned that the legendary Others may be closer than they think. After discovering the wreckage of three kroath ships, and realizing that they had completed a stardrive transit in under 121 hours, the Concord was very keen to discover what had happened. Unfortunately for them, one of the people responsible, Gabriel Connor, was not all that interested in staying around, and the other, the edanwe hunter Tlelai, either cannot or will not tell them what happened.

SYSTEM LOG

The excitement of discovering a new habitable system and a previously unknown sentient species has made Eldala the hot destination of the moment, to the unhappiness of its inhabitants and the frustration of the Concord.

HATIRE PILGRIMAGE IMMINENT?

Word quickly reached Haven of the immense power demonstrated by the Precursor construct on Danwell. High Minister Rhodes has interpreted this as the Cosimir's will, directing the righteous destruction of the blasphemous kroath.

The spiritual bond between the edanweir, especially the ancient sentience expressed in their child-seers, resonates with Hatire teachings of the Cosimir. Pilgrimages of the faithful have already begun to assemble on Haven and Grith, and it won't be long before the Concord will have to deal with thousands of sentients hoping to touch the divine.

THE LUNATIC FRINGE

There's something very strange about one of Tavkath's moons—it shouldn't be there.

Early surveys of the Eldala system revealed the usual flocks of satellites about both its gas giants, but they had listed only twenty-one moons circling Tavkath. The Concord's most recent examination of the system turned up another, whose existence has been confirmed by independent observation. It's easy to miss unremarkable chunks of rock, but this one has an icy surface (much like Jupiter's Io) with a high albedo—it's hard to believe anyone could overlook it.

Rumors abound. A popular opinion is that the "Others" mentioned by the edanweir never left Eldala but remained here to observe the system. With the arrival of the Concord, they abandoned their hidden base, which is now visible. After all, they say, who could make a whole moon simply vanish? The scientific community derides this idea. It's an error of the original surveyors, they insist. Look how many new moons turned up around the worlds of the old Earth system as detection improved. This one, they say, is interesting for its surface characteristics—nothing more.

ADVENTURE HOOK: OPEN EYES

There are many mysteries among the edanweir, but none are so affecting as the *mahlahnwe'ir yahein*. The experience of contact with one is unforgettable; the few sentients who've undergone it speak in terms of "ancient will" looking out from the child's eyes.

Though there are only a couple of such seers in each generation, they are quickly recognized by all the edanwe communities. How this happens has not been previously observed, though Concord xenopsychologists speculate that it is a form of "psionic Precursor relic" and that the edanweir are somehow able to detect its emotional resonance.

The reverence in which the natives hold these gifted children normally keeps nonnative sentients from intruding. But now, an unhappy circumstance has given outsiders the chance to learn about and even participate in the search for a new seer.

BACKGROUND

The heroes are part of a first-contact team that's recently begun working with Tlelai's small hunting group, recording native legends and subjecting Tlelai to yet more medical tests. As with any newcomers, the heroes were brought into the presence of the *mahlahnwe'ir yahein* to be judged. They passed—though the medical experts learned not to ask more than once about examining the seer. At one point during the interview, the contact team became aware of a central thought. It was not verbal but more of an impression, a feeling of increased light and wisdom. The community was aware of it too, evidently, for when the seer had finished, the Elder spoke: "The eye is opening." Every tail twitched in silent acknowledgement.

Tlelai explains to the heroes that when a new *mahlahnwe'ir yahein* is born, the other seers are instantly in community with the child. They can't tell where he or she is, though, so a call goes out to all the settlements to search for the new seer in their midst. Already the Elder's second is sending out radio messages to the other communities while the Elder himself retires to the central hall of the longhouse.

The search for a new seer follows ancient tradition. The youngster doesn't immediately demonstrate extraordinary powers; they are discerned and awakened fully through a telepathic probe that only the Elder may conduct after ceremonial preparation. The first-contact team is forbidden to watch the ritual, but observe several nursing mothers enter and leave the longhouse. There aren't many candidates, and after a relatively short time the Elder emerges to announce

that the *mahlahnwe'ir yahein* is not in this community. The people wait for word from the rest of the planet. But something is wrong. Nowhere among the reporting villages and camps is there any sign of the new seer. The other seers are growing agitated—"The eye grows dim" is their only thought.

It turns out that one of the hunting camps hasn't yet reported in. This group had left some months earlier for the wilderness bordering the retreating southern glaciers; the last radio communication was more than 20 days ago, but this isn't unusual for an isolated hunting community. Now, however, attempts to raise the camp by radio have been unsuccessful. Some disaster has apparently befallen them—and the new seer, who must have been born since their departure.

This is an opportunity for the heroes to improve Concord relations with the edanweir, by helping out in the planetwide search for the missing party. The airship that brought the *mahlahnwe'ir yahein* is ready to begin the hunt, and given that the nature of the disaster is unknown, the edanweir are willing to enlist the heroes' assistance.

What sort of disaster befell the hunting settlement is up to the Gamemaster. Perhaps the retreating glaciers triggered an earthquake that stranded the party and knocked out radio communications. Maybe enraged kitiete took out most or all of the hunters, leaving the child virtually unprotected in the wilderness. It's even possible that something uncanny cut them off from their kin, such as a previously unknown Precursor artifact or a hidden outpost of the Others.

What's important is emphasizing the bond between the edanweir amid the extreme loneliness of their environment, perhaps bringing the heroes "into community" in the process. This can be the opening for a Danwell-centered campaign, whether to strengthen ties between the edanweir and the Concord, or to help protect this fragile world from interference by other stellar nations.

SUPPORTING CAST

You'll probably need more detailed information about the Elder of the community as well as the crew of the airship. Base these on the general edanwe stats, but give the Elder extra Interaction specialty skills (such as *charm*) as well as the Leadership broad skill. Minor Concord functionaries can be generated as needed from the templates in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* in the *Gamemaster Guide*.

Sixty days. In just over sixty days, everything that Arrivers and Vergers took for granted about the Vieron star system has become meaningless.

Well, not everything changed. Vieron remains an F9 star, just as when first surveyed. Its ten planets continue in their predictable orbits. Corazón de Fuego is still Vieron's second planet and the focus of interest despite conditions adverse to life. In the broadest terms, human nature and the covetousness of stellar nations haven't gone anywhere.

The change that has swept over the Vieron system since May 2502 is due entirely to the newcomers—kroath. Verge colonies have reported occasional kroath skirmishes and raids over more than a decade, but the attackers never lingered in one spot for long. The defenders either managed to chase off the kroath spheres and assault troops or they were destroyed, as was the case in the Armstrong and Crow colonies.

A thousand Vieronites still in the system can attest to a change in kroath tactics. The other thousand might agree, but they were the first victims—and probably not the last.

HISTORY

The Sothvec colonists who came to Vieron in its early days had no idea that the soil they built on would be stained by so much blood, most of it their own. Who would want to contest Vieron? There were so many more valuable and attractive worlds in the Verge. In fact, the Sothvecs chose Vieron only because it was the best candidate they had found before the expedition's funding ran out.

Even in the mayhem of the Second Galactic War, the colonists on Corazón never expected an attack. But the Thuldian Empire was at war with Sothvec Industries, and Emperor Decret directed all imperial outposts to destroy or bring to heel the Empire's enemies wherever they were found. Since this message went out years before the fall of the Kendai drivesat relay, the Thuldans on Alitar heard and responded promptly. Despite Corazón's hideous environment and Sothvec resistance (the one a great obstacle and the other trifling), the Thuldans forced a surrender in under a year.

THE FIRST OCCUPATION

The years of the Thuldian Occupation, lasting nearly a century, went poorly for everyone. The Sothvec people had no love for their new masters, and violent insurgency went on for decades. Over time, though, the populations of Thuldian conquerors and Sothvec laborers began to mingle, to put it delicately. Few Thuldans had the genetic modifications to survive the planet's conditions; too many Alitarins were assigned to extended duty tours on Corazón, and the government sent too few replacements. The beaten Sothvecs made the best of a bad situation by providing good company, and eventually spouses and families, to their conquerors.

Then came the renewal of the war with the Galvinites in 2461. Just over half of the Alitarins on Corazón, the best soldiers there, returned home to fight. Left behind were the Thuldans who had settled down or who had been born and grown up in the system. So the Occupation, whose name grew less and less fitting each passing year, officially came to an end. The local population began to use the term "Vieronite" to describe themselves,

whether of Sothvec or Thuldian origin. While the society wasn't as united in spirit as it was in law, and accusations of favoritism remained, the three cities of Corazón managed to work out their difficulties. Of the three, Jaén became the largest and most comfortable, Tavira, the home of the local government, and Algeciras, the center of heavy-metals mining and the location of the world's only spaceport.

THE SILENCE ENDS

Legally, Vieron's status drifted in limbo when the stellar nations returned to the Verge in 2497. Sothvec Industries was no longer more than a historical footnote, yet the Concord's Consulate ministers were reluctant to recognize the Alitarin claim and thus encourage more brigandage or colonialism by the Verge governments. So Vieron was left independent like many Verge systems,

CHAPTER

VIERON

6

PREVIOUS REFERENCES

The Vieron star system was introduced in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting. See the "Vieron" section of *Chapter 4: The Verge* for a brief outline of the system's history and the nature of its single colonized world, Corazón de Fuego.

A description of the alien species known as the kroath is found in the *Externals* chapter of the *Alien Compendium: Creatures of the Verge* accessory. Gamemasters and players may want to review these references and keep them handy; this chapter assumes such information is available.

technically within the purview of the Galactic Concord, which acknowledges the colony's right to self-determination.

Being independent seemed like a good idea at first. Much of the infrastructure on Corazón needed serious repairs. While not very attractive to settlers, the small colony would be easy for a stellar nation to support with supplies and resources. In return, the patron would gain access to Corazón's rich deposits of heavy metals and minerals.

Wouldn't any stellar nation enjoy the opportunity to thumb its nose at the Empire by moving on its former property? The Vieronites looked forward to being wooed; other systems were courted with generous donations, technical assistance, and driveships for cargo and passage. To that end, they established a public relations effort that kept visitors to the Vieron system on their best behavior.

In retrospect, the people of Corazón might have been better off tied to a stellar nation or even a Verge government. Many Vieronites admit today that they should have turned to the Empire immediately. This time, the stellar nations refused to cater to a Verge system's needs; their glorious promises never materialized. Most foreign powers didn't expect Corazón to be very profitable—especially when competing stellar nations might make their investments moot. Its minerals were surely valuable, but they could always be bought on the open exchange or at a discount directly from Vieron. Plus, most of the stellar nations viewed the Empire's prerogative differently than expected; Vieron just wasn't worth fighting the Thuldans for. After months of apologetic delays, little assistance appeared from the Stellar Ring.

TABLE 8: VIERON SYSTEM

	Infierno	Corazón	Anselmo	Ensueño	Turcador
Primary	Vieron	Vieron	Vieron	Vieron	Vieron
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 3	Class 4	Class 4	Class 4
Gravity	G4 (2.41 g)	G4 (4.4 g)	G1 (0.63 g)	G3 (2.04 g)	G2 (0.83 g)
Radiation	R3 (14 rem/day)	R2 (4 rem/wk)	R2 (7 rem/wk)	R2 (9 rem/wk)	R2 (14 rem/wk)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A3 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P4 (7.34 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)
Heat	H4 (143° C)	H3 (94° C)	H2 (11° C)	H2 (-9° C)	H1 (-51° C)
Orbital Distance	0.60 AU	1.20 AU	1.45 AU	1.68 AU	1.89 AU
Diameter	7,340 km	15,340 km	8,888 km	4,288 km	4,200 km
Year	161.8 days	457.8 days	608.0 days	758.3 days	904.8 days
Day	20.2 days	5.8 hours	14.8 hours	7.67 hours	6.45 days
Axial Tilt	33.4°	20.1°	5.2°	13.6°	65.0°
Density	4.18	3.67	0.91	6.03	2.51
# Satellites	1	0	3	2	0
	Pimiento	Salado	Malvado	Dyente	Virrey
Primary	Vieron	Vieron	Vieron	Vieron	Vieron
Planetary Class	Class 5	Class 5	Class 5	Class 5	Class 5
Gravity	G3 (1.47 g)	G4 (2.57 g)	G4 (2.90 g)	G2 (0.89 g)	G3 (1.29 g)
Radiation	R4 (187 rem/hr)	R5 (550 rem/hr)	R4 (245 rem/hr)	R4 (381 rem/hr)	R4 (290 rem/hr)
Atmosphere	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A1 (H ₂ , He)
Pressure	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)
Heat	H1 (-132° C)	H1 (-190° C)	H0 (-203° C)	H0 (-210° C)	H0 (-220° C)
Orbital Distance	4.54 AU	10.10 AU	14.22 AU	19.18 AU	30.06 AU
Diameter	107,024 km	146,200 km	126,400 km	58,100 km	44,200 km
Year	9.23 years	30.6 years	51.1 years	80.1 years	157.1 years
Day	10.43 hours	15.83 hours	9.89 hours	37.1 hours	39.83 hours
Axial Tilt	33.7°	48.1°	18.3°	38.5°	9.1°
Density	0.18	0.22	0.29	0.20	0.46
# Satellites	6	21	19	11	6

The sole exception was the Rigunmor Star Consortium. Offering long-term financing, commercial assistance, and other economic considerations, the Rigunmor Guilders made a good case. But no one had any illusions about their motivations: The olive branch teasingly extended to Corazón concealed a barb aimed straight at Thuldan Prime.

So the Vieronites stayed independent and continued to survive on meager handouts, empty promises, and their own stubbornness.

UNINVITED GUESTS

These were the important events up to May 2502, but no one talks about the Alitarin-Sothvec or Thuldan-Rigunmor disputes anymore. Now, it's everyone against the kroath.

On May 3 at 16:04 Galactic Standard Time, satellites in orbit of Corazón, along with the Thuldan vessels *Reload Time* and *Storm Delay*, detected seven vessels entering the system. They simply appeared within sensor range at the system's edge and began to move swiftly into its heart, without any of the signature radiation of starrise or a transponder identification signal. Gravitic sensors estimated the size of the ships from their high mass: one cruiser, two destroyers, two frigates, and two corvettes.

Reload Time, an escort-class military ship carrying a Thuldan ambassador and diplomatic mission, was the closest vessel. Its captain attempted to communicate with the approaching ships. The ship had just enough time to send out a distress call before two energy blasts from one of the frigate-sized vessels scattered its atoms forever. The merchant freighter *Storm Delay* immediately broke orbit and activated its stardrive.

The fleet closed in. Fourteen orbital defense satellites, mostly Alitarin relics, lasted about seven minutes. Their greatest effect was to illuminate the night skies of Corazón

with flashes of yellow and red punctuated by soundless explosions of their death. Groundbased sensors recorded no measurable damage to the hostile vessels.

With unquestioned reign over the skies, the alien craft quietly settled into orbit. Hours passed while the Vieronites variously panicked and prepared for the worst. They had no means to answer this kind of force. Six civilian starships (all there were on planet) leapt up, to either make starfall immediately or race away from Corazón as fast as possible. The fleet ignored them. A mob rushed the already-empty spaceport, desperate to find refuge. Police tried to preserve order, ordering citizens back to their homes, but no army or navy existed to do much of anything else. With just 50 law enforcement officers among the population of 2,000, little could stem the chaos. Through it all, the hostile fleet ignored hundreds of communication attempts.

Finally, at 22:41 GST, the seven vessels shimmered and vanished. For a moment, Vieronites gazed at their sensor readouts in dumbfounded relief. Their joy lasted only a few moments. From where the fleet had drifted moments before, 15 small craft were descending into Corazón's turbulent atmosphere—on a direct course for Jaén, the planet's largest settlement.

THE SECOND OCCUPATION BEGINS

The battle for Jaén, according to the few who escaped, was bloody and short. Citizens watched helplessly as the dropships deposited more than a hundred armored humanoids onto the ground outside of Jaén's dome. Five minutes later, the invaders had broken through the primary entrance and were slaughtering the inhabitants. One survivor described police officers, armed only with pistols, valiantly but hopelessly trying to defend the city from more numerous and better-armed opponents.

SOTHVEC INDUSTRIES

Sothvec Industries was a business conglomerate that formed soon after the production of the first stardrives. Following the examples of VoidCorp and the Rigunmor Star Consortium, this collection of agriculture and livestock business interests funded colonies on a number of worlds. As the 23rd century saw the expansion of humanity and human governments in space, Sothvec Industries profited from a power vacuum within its areas of interest and became a potent force. Its business leaders made steady profits and never saw a need to change. Yet nothing bound Sothvec's diverse peoples together in any significant way; without some unifying ideal or vision, they had no reason to stand together, and it was easier for many to accept the Thuldans rather than resist and be destroyed. The last Sothvec systems formally surrendered to the Imperial navy on September 19, 2356. The Empire would accept only unconditional surrender, so on that day Sothvec joined three stellar nations in Thuldan oblivion.

Former Sothvec citizens still live today, but under the flag of the Empire. Occupation troops ensure loyalty to the Emperor, and slowly the Sothvec culture has disappeared. Unlike the lingering memory of other stellar nations, such as the Dreth Commonwealth and the Sultanate of Fomalhaut, the Sothvec way of life seemed to dry up and blow away like so many dead leaves. About all that Sothvecs are remembered for now are some of the original company's advances in adapting Earth-based animal species to life in space and on alien worlds.

Should a player wish to create a Sothvec, treat the hero as an independent with a -1 bonus to all Animal Handling skill checks. Most of the galaxy will consider him or her a citizen of the Thuldan Empire.

The people of Algeciras and Tavira wept, prayed, and waited for their end. A few fled in skycars to the mines or the barren countryside. Days passed, then weeks. Finally, in a rare moment of courage, the manager of Algeciras flew in a skycar to Jaén with some of his police. Staring through its transparent dome, he sent images of aliens—universally recognized as kroath—wandering the streets without a human in sight. He also reported a dozen 3-meter green spheres. A few minutes later, several of them rose into the air and ended the manager's transmission.

Little changed over the next several weeks. The Vieronites cringed within the two domed settlements they had left. Each week, scouts risked their lives flying by Jaén to confirm that the kroath were still there. The Vieronites watched in surprise as the invaders dug in, setting up fortifications, watch towers, and embankments. Such defenses weren't needed against the pathetic force that the Vieronites could muster, and the Concord's information about the kroath had never mentioned this behavior.

IMPERIAL HEROICS

Meanwhile, the *Storm Delay* raced to carry word to the outside of what had happened. With three starfalls, its 10ly-

RIGA 9

Riga 9 is a dull red dwarf star (Verge coordinates: 0.45/-3.53/-1.54) around which three lifeless worlds orbit. The Galactic Concord records no settlements in and no claims to the system; in fact, no one is believed to live there. The Thuldans know better.

Riga 9's sole value is that it lies a mere 3.88 light-years from Aegis—a star system in which the Thuldans have a definite interest—and the Empire takes advantage of this. The Regency government and the Galactic Concord might protest a fleet of Thuldan cruisers gathering at Aegis, but they can do little about warships lurking in a nearby system.

The Thuldan navy deploys vessels carefully around Riga 9. Starfall detectors in Aegis can sense ship movements in the area, and the Regency already suspects that Riga 9 has been visited by capital ships. A few starships are always present, but there are typically never more than a cruiser or two, unless the imperial military command orders a buildup prior to engagement in the Aegis system.



capable stardrive brought the *Storm Delay* to the Riga 9 star system, 21 days after the ship left Vieron. (See the "Riga 9" sidebar.) There, on May 24, its captain reported to the ranking Thuldan officer, Commodore Thea Pfender. He informed her of

"This is a warning to everyone and everything in this system. I'm here to win a war. Help me, get out of my way, or prepare your soul for all the torments of hell."

—Commodore Thea Pfender

the invading, and presumably external, alien fleet and the death of the Thuldan ambassador—who, by chance, was a distant relative of Emperor Regist himself.

Commodore Pfender wasted no time responding. She ordered the *Storm Delay* to continue on to Aegis and inform the Galactic Concord. Meanwhile she assumed command of the nine Thuldan military ships stationed at Riga 9, the light cruiser *Total Commitment* and its eight supporting space fighters. They entered drivespace immediately, abandoning Riga 9.

Twelve days later, on June 2, the Thuldan force made starrise in the Vieron system. While the fighters deployed in search of hostiles, Pfender contacted the Vieronites in Tavira for an update on the situation. There was no sign of the enemy ships, but kroath activity continued in and

around Jaén. The kroath could be seen from space scouting, patrolling, and occasionally spying near Algeciras and Tavira—just like the Vieronites. On hearing the news, Pfender moved the light cruiser into Corazón orbit and deployed the eight

space fighters into scouting patrols.

After a day passed with no change in the situation, Commodore Pfender took her armored shuttle to Algeciras, escorted by 52 Thuldan Legionnaires. There she proposed a coordinated assault on Jaén to liberate the planet from the kroath: The Vieronites would join with the Legionnaires under air cover and bombardment from the cruiser. The Vieronites stiffened their backbone and agreed to the aggressive plan.

In the darkness above, a tense peace ruled the decks of the *Total Commitment*, now under the command of Captain Joseph Pfender, the commodore's younger brother. Eight hours after Commodore Pfender descended, the hostile cruiser suddenly appeared again, just a few thousand kilometers off the *Total Commitment's* stern. This close, its almost living hull could be seen shimmering and flickering. The cruiser was unquestionably external—and unfriendly, opening fire with multiple render cannons. A pitched battle ensued in the space above Corazón, one the outmatched Thuldan ship was never destined to win. Amazingly, the smaller cruiser managed to outmaneuver the hostile vessel for half an hour before damage began to ripple over its hull unchecked.

Captain Pfender radioed to his sister. "For the Empire!" he swore, and pulled the *Total Commitment* around to charge the enemy ship, guns blazing all the while. The Thuldan cruiser and its crew delivered the ultimate sacrifice, exploding on impact, its mass reactor detonating in a flare of heavenly brilliance. The *Total Commitment* was gone—but so was the external cruiser. Planetbound observers watched as debris rained down from the blast.

THE THULDAN LEGIONS

For more than a century, the Legions were the pride of the Empire. Sadly, as the bitterness of defeat and the expectations of more losses sunk in, the Thuldan Legions lost both their heart and their legendary valor in battle. In the years since, Emperor Regist has made it a priority to restore the Legions' *esprit de corps*. In the last decade, he instituted the use of ancient Roman ranks. In addition, each unit was assigned a standard-bearer.

It's strange to encounter today's Thuldan Legions, equipped with fine 26th-century gear but calling themselves by outdated names. These take some getting used to, especially for those used to more modern rank structures. A rough comparison of Legion ranks follows.

Legate	General
Tribune	Colonel
Prefect	Major
Prime Centurion	Captain
Centurion	Lieutenant
Optio	Sergeant
Principal	Corporal

For the time being, naval ranks in the Empire remain unchanged.

AT WAR

"For wanting to unite humanity against potential threats, we've been accused of trying to take over the Verge and even the galaxy. Take whatever view of the Empire you please; such politics no longer interest me. What interests me is consigning every last kroath to the nightmarish oblivion that spawned them. I pledge my life and the lives of the Legions to that pursuit."

"Today, the Thuldan Empire declares war on the foul and damned species known as the kroath, along with any that would stand with them. We shall end their blight on the face of the galaxy. We shall exterminate them."

—Commodore Thea Pfender, June 3, 2502

That was a couple of weeks ago. Today, the fighting on Corazón continues unabated. Here, in a region of space filled with great ships and terrible forces, the war against the Verge is championed by a few hundred kroath on one side. Opposite them, fifty Legionnaires and a thousand untrained civilians fight for their lives and all that humanity holds dear.

For the most part, the conflict consists of skirmishes on the inhospitable surface as the Legionnaires journey into the wasteland in pursuit of kroath. Pfender commanded a single attack against Jaén on June 7 but quickly aborted it in the face of superior kroath tactics and defenses. The kroath took a swing at Algeciras a day later; despite the loss of two Legionnaires and 50 civilians, the defenders forced a withdrawal.

Meanwhile, neither side enjoys air or space superiority. At least a dozen kroath spheres have been spotted near Jaén or elsewhere on the planet (statistics for the kroath sphere appear in the *Externals* chapter of the *Alien Compendium*). Only four Thuldan space fighters survived the battle between the cruisers; it's all the Thuldans can do to keep them in good working order and not get them destroyed when they're so outnumbered. In addition, each side has a few armored dropships, and the Vieronites possess a dozen or so civilian skycars that have been pressed into military service.

The only other events of note have been the arrival of two independent merchant ships in the system. Apparently their crews hadn't heard about recent developments. Both times, the tradeships were destroyed by kroath spheres.

SERVANTS OF THE EMPIRE

The Thuldans defending Corazón feel certain that word of their struggle has by now reached the ear of Emperor Regist himself. For this, the Legionnaires are happy and proud. They don't expect instant relief, but they know that their service to the Empire will not go unnoticed, though it may cost them their lives on this miserable blasted rock.

The Thuldan objective set out in Commodore Pfender's speech brooks no compromise and tolerates no surrender, even if that were possible when dealing with the silent kroath. The Legionnaires' sworn duty is to defend the homes of the Vieronites and avenge their fallen comrades. In this, as in most Thuldan oaths, the life of an individual Legionnaire is irrelevant.

Though Commodore Pfender is a naval officer, she's in command of offense and defense on the ground (and of most Vieronite elements as well). Her absolute commitment to victory is well known to the men and women serving under her. Privately, some Legionnaires speculate that she's cracked since her brother's death, but they continue to follow her orders without question.

Fifty Legionnaires proudly serve under Pfender. Commanding the Legionnaires is Centurion Wolfgang Model (Hm/Thuldan/CS-11), who advises the commodore

THULDAN LEGIONNAIRE

Level 3 human Combat Spec

STR 12	(+1)	INT 9	(0)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 12		PER 8	

Durability: 12/12/6/6 Action check: 13+/12/6/3

Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 1

Flaw: Code of Honor

Attacks

Unarmed—power 13/6/3 d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s LI/O

Short sword¹ 12/6/3 d4+1w/d6+1w/d6+3w LI/O

9mm ch pistol 9/4/2 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m HI/O

11mm ch aut rifle² 12/6/3 d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m HI/O

¹ Use a +d4 base situation die for skill checks.

² Use a -d4 base situation die for skill checks.

Defenses

Body tank: 2d4+1 (LI), 2d4+1 (HI), 2d4 (En)

Cerametal shield³: +2 (LI), +2 (HI), +2 (En)

³ See *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

Skills

Armor [12]—powered [13]; Athletics [12]; Heavy Weapons [12]; Melee Weapons [12]; Unarmed [12]—power [13]; Modern [9]—rifle [12]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [12]—endurance [14]; Knowledge [9]—first aid [10]; language: Thuldan [12]; language: Standard [11]; Awareness [10]; Resolve [10]; Interaction [8].

This information describes a typical Legionnaire on Corazón, but can be used for any Legionnaire encountered during play. Three of those on Corazón carry a KZ 160 13mm charge machine gun (if you wish to use these, see "Other Charge Weapons" in the *Arms & Equipment Guide*).

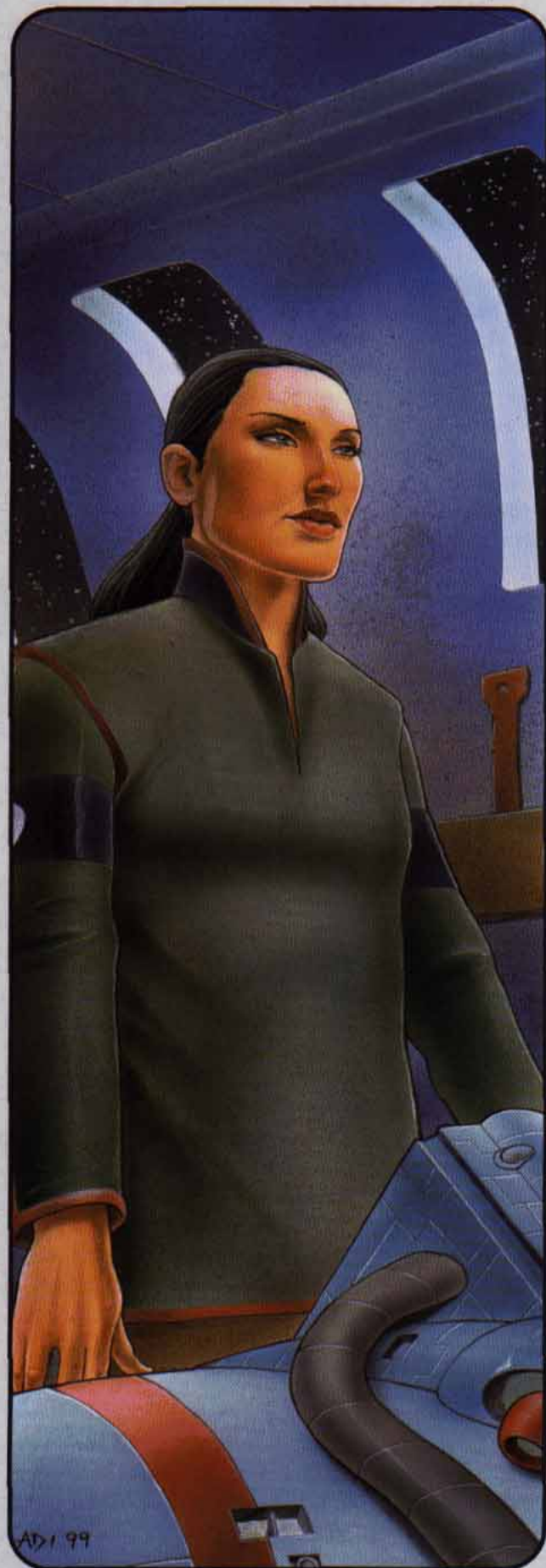
Higher-ranked Legionnaires add Tactics and Leadership skills and additional ranks in military skills.

on ground tactics and the deployment of forces. Optio Julianna Sauter (Hf/Thuldan/CS-6) is Model's second-in-command, assisted by four principals (Hm/Thuldan/CS-5). Coline Shein is the Legionnaires' standard-bearer (Hf/Concord/CS-3).

VIERONITES

Outnumbering the Legions twenty to one, but greatly inferior in strength of arms, is the civilian populace of Corazón. A thousand of them, unready for battle, failed to stand up to the kroath assault. The survivors of Corazón promise that their lives will not be bought so cheaply.

The Thuldan military, unquestioned leaders in matters of war now, made conscripts of every man and woman between the ages of 15 and 150. The citizens are expected



THEA PFENDER THULDAN COMMODORE

Level 8 human mutant Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 10 (0) INT 13 (+2)

DEX 9 (0) WIL 12 (+1)

CON 10 PER 11

Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action check: 13+/12/6/3

Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed Attack 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

9mm ch pistol 10/5/2 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m HI/O

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [10]; Modern [9]-pistol [10]; Vehicle [9]-space [14]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11]; Knowledge [13]-language: Standard [16], language: Thuldan [16]; System Operation [13]; Tactics [13]-space [18]; Administration [12]; Awareness [12]; Resolve [12]; Culture [11]-diplomacy [12], etiquette: Thuldan [15], etiquette: Concord [13]; Interaction [11]-charm [12]; Leadership [11]-command [16].

Mutations

Enhanced Intelligence (Good): +2 bonus to Int score

Minor Physical Change (Moderate): Four fingers per hand

With the notable exception of her four-fingered hands, Thea Pfender is a model Thuldan naval officer. An attractive woman at 40 years old, Pfender never saw action during the Second Galactic War but has served admirably in a half-dozen smaller engagements since. Her loyalty to the Empire has never been in question. As a naval officer, she brought success to her family, allowing her brother to follow in her footsteps.

Pfender needs to be at her best; she's been thrown into an unfamiliar situation, leading Thuldan and Vieronite alike into battles for which she was never trained. The strain has already begun to show in the last few weeks. Her brother's death couldn't have come at a worse time. While many Vieronites focus on survival, Pfender can't tolerate the thought of kroath escaping Vieron without being repaid in full for their butchery. Putting aside the need to mourn for her brother and friends lost aboard the *Total Commitment*, she is driven by her passion for vengeance.

Even though the people of Corazón fear her blind drive, they cheer her on as their hero. They need her, and they're quickly coming to revere their champion.

VIERONITE CIVILIAN

Human nonprofessional

STR 9 ¹	(0)	INT 9	(0)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 9		PER 9	

Durability: 9/9/5/5¹ Action check: 10+/9/4/2

Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Marginal/1 Last resorts: 1

¹ Sothvec (only) cyberware increases Strength to 10.

² Sothvec (only) cyberware increases to 11/9/5/5

Attacks

Unarmed Attack^{3,4} 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

9mm ch pistol⁴ 9/4/2 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m HI/O

³ Sothvec (only) cyberware increases score to 5/2/1.

⁴ Use a +d4 base situation die for skill checks.

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [9]⁵; Modern Ranged Weapons [9]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [9]; Business [9]; Knowledge [9]—*computer operation* [10], *first aid* [10], *language: Thuldán* [12], *language: Standard* [12], *Physical Science* [9]—*geology* [11], *System Operation* [9], *Awareness* [9], *Interaction* [9]—*charm* [10].

⁵ Sothvec (only) cyberware increases skill score to 10.

Mutations (Alitarin only)

Environmental adaptations (Ordinary): Hot climate, thick atmosphere

Gravity adaptation (Ordinary): High gravity

Toxin tolerance (Ordinary)

Radiation tolerance (Good)

Weak immunity (Slight)

Moderate environmental sensitivities (Moderate): Light gravity, cold climate

Cyber Gear (Sothvec only)

Cyberfilter (see below); cyberoptics (Amazing); exoskeleton (Ordinary); MusclePlus (Ordinary); nanocomputer (Ordinary).

This describes the average Vieronite now on Corazón, either Alitarin or Sothvec in background (with a small overlap). Training over the last few months has introduced firearms and a basic knowledge of their use. Of course, exceptional and atypical representatives exist.

In the cyber enhanced population, cyberfilters (cyber tolerance size of 1) in the lungs and throat allow breathing Corazón's atmosphere without difficulty. After a week of use, however, the filters must be replaced. Fortunately, that's an easy operation and doesn't require surgery.

to be able to defend themselves and the cities of Corazón when called on. The composition of most scouting parties that go outside the domes is half Legionnaire and half Vieronite. While a few Vieronites occasionally mutter that they serve no purpose other than cannon fodder on such missions, most thank their stars that the Thuldans are here, and are happy to have them alongside.

Commodore Pfender has spread word in Algeciras and Tavira to prepare for a major assault on kroath-occupied Jaén. As everyone scrambles to prepare, general readiness and training has increased everywhere—most likely Pfender's goal in announcing the attack.

The typical Vieronite is a nonprofessional, with average Ability Scores and only a few skills, most of them unheroic in nature. Twenty-five police officers are divided between Tavira and Algeciras (use the Marginal or Ordinary Law Enforcer template in *Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast* of the *Gamemaster Guide*). These few are armed with stutter pistols, 9mm charge pistols, and a few precious shotguns. Not many Vieronites have professional military or security training, but they are quickly learning all that they can from willing Legionnaire teachers.

CYBERTECH AND MUTATIONS

Only five percent of the civilian populace of Corazón are pure, unmodified humans. The rest have been specially adapted to survive, or at least temporarily tolerate, the planet's extreme conditions. This is one advantage the Vieronites enjoy over their Thuldán fellows-in-arms. Most can last for a short time outdoors unprotected while Thuldans must wear environmental suits.

Roughly half the Vieronites have a Thuldán background by way of Alitar and the genetic modifications to match (see the statistics for a typical Vieronite civilian in the sidebar). These include adaptations to the planet's high gravity and temperature, as well as reduced susceptibility to radiation and Corazón's toxic atmosphere. A few mutants lack one or more of the advantages, but the drawbacks among the genetically engineered are almost universal.

The other modified Vieronites incorporate cybertech to survive. The most common cybernetic enhancements are an exoskeleton and MusclePlus, both designed to tolerate high-gravity conditions. Cyberoptics with night vision capability are common, given the rapid day-night cycle. Most cyber-enhanced Vieronites have cyberfilters installed in their lungs and throat (see the sidebar). They still require an e-suit to withstand heat, though.

KROATH

The big question is: Why here, and why now? For years, Vergers told each other frightening stories of kroath that would appear, destroy, and snatch people up, never to be seen again. But siege warfare, occupying territory, slugging it out toe-to-toe with trained soldiers—that was never the

kroath style. They've always been hit-and-run artists, ambushers of the weak and undefended.

A few theories have grown in popularity. Many proud Vieronites believe they put up a stiffer resistance than the kroath expected. Some Thuldans think that the kroath would have left already but for the loss of their ride. Commodore Pfender, meanwhile, has spent the last two months studying everything that was available in public databases about the kroath and other externals. To her, their choice of little Vieron can indicate one of only two things: There's something here of value to the kroath that humanity hasn't discovered or doesn't recognize as valuable; or the kroath chose this battleground as a live exercise for their soldiers, a test.

Some circumstantial evidence supports the latter possibility. The kroath could have razed both Algeciras and Tavira in the weeks between their first assault and the arrival of the *Total Commitment*. Why wait around for enemy reinforcements to arrive—unless they wanted the challenge to test their abilities? To the paranoid, the conflict here seems even more scripted since the destruction of the Thuldan cruiser, restricted as it is to land warfare. It's true that kroath raids and attacks have tripled since the Legionnaires landed.

STRATEGY

One advantage the kroath enjoy, ironically, is that they own only one of the planet's three cities. Both sides in this engagement have limited assets, but the kroath can send out offensive forces while keeping defenders in a single location. The Thuldans and Vieronites struggle to garrison Algeciras and Tavira simultaneously.

The technological advantage can't be ignored either. Kroath armor and weaponry demonstrate a marked superiority over human equivalents. Their bioarmor is especially formidable, and only the most well-placed and firepower-intensive attacks have a chance to put a kroath down. In addition, the kroath bioarmor provides nearly full protection from Corazón's environment.

The kroath have yet to throw their full strength at the enemy. For the moment at least, they seem to take delight in overland encounters between scouts and skirmishing parties, and in the occasional surprise assault drop near the human cities or mines. These demonstrate their well-known predilection for fierce, short encounters. With their effective enrage ability, they are fearsome in brief fights, then withdraw for a day or more before mounting another furious offensive. Still, it's only a matter of time before the kroath plan calls for an end to testing small-unit tactics and a beginning to large-scale conflict of hundreds against hundreds.

CORAZÓN DE FUEGA

The planet spins at a fearful clip, with periods of night and day lasting just 2.9 hours each. Before the kroath intrusion, Corazón itself was the most significant challenge in a Vieronite's life. It's an unforgiving world, where a single mistake or accident can end the life of the reckless or the unfortunate.

It's also a world, a bit like faraway Lison, that can make one rich. One of the reasons for Corazón's intense gravity is that the planet is so dense—full of valuable heavy metals and radioactive ores.

WHAT'S NEXT? A GAMEMASTER NOTE

At present, the conflict between kroath and the sentient species of the Stellar Ring rests in a delicate balance. Depending on the evolution of your adventures, that conflict could continue indefinitely in its current state, expand, or wither away. For now, it largely takes the form of mobile infantry action on Corazón. It will be up to a brave few to do battle with the kroath for possession of the Vieron system.

Eventually the Concord will want to push out the external threat from Vieron, but it must be careful about risking expensive assets in such a small system. For now, it's just the Thuldans and the Vieronites, and perhaps a few heroes, holding them off.

How to get your heroes into the battle? They might stop by the Vieron system while traveling or conducting trade, without having heard yet what's going on. Maybe they're scouts for the Galactic Concord, chased to the surface by kroath spheres so they can

encounter Commodore Pfender, her Thuldan Legionnaires, and the Vieronites.

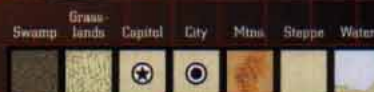
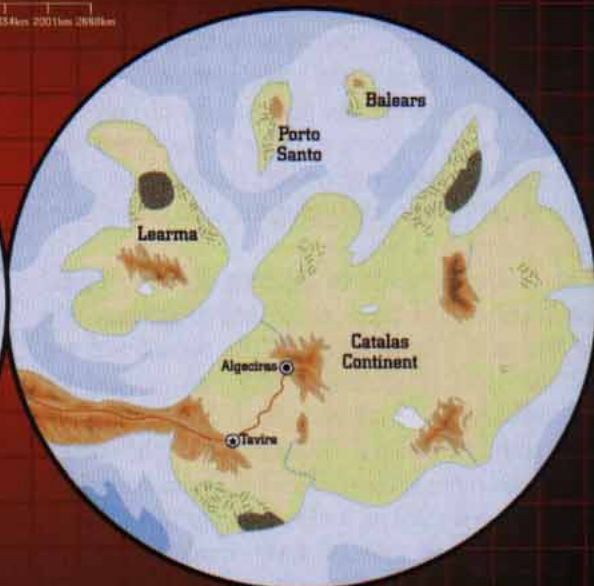
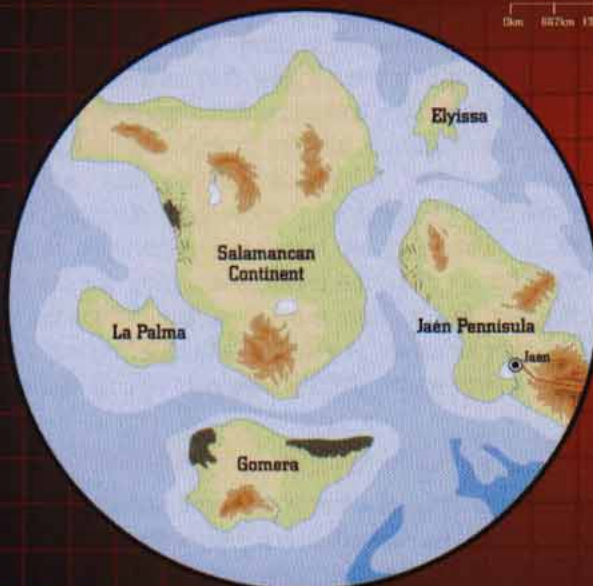
At first you'll need a few tricks to confine the fight to the Vieron system and preserve its status as an occupied planet. Right now, the Thuldans estimate there are around 200 kroath on Corazón. Though it's a pretty good guess, there's sufficient lack of information that you can bring in additional kroath whenever you need them. After all, the original attacking fleet had more ships than the single cruiser that died. Who knows where the rest vanished to? Are they n'sss vessels, as many suspect?

Whatever your answer, you can use those phantom warships, equipped with cloaking technology beyond the ken of humanity, to enforce the status quo in Vieron. Should the Empire or the Concord decide to reinforce the system, the kroath may produce reinforcements as well.

Corazón de Fuego

SCALE

0km 857km 1354km 2001km 2860km



ENVIRONMENT

Corazón presents a series of hazards to the unprotected. The immense gravity imposes a +3 penalty on skill checks for physical actions and reduces movement to one-quarter of normal. Every hour in the high gravity requires an exhaustion check for fatigue damage.

Radiation, a common silent killer, isn't that bad on this world. It's confined to the mines and ores; the heavy, rocky crust shields those on the surface. Still, Constitution feat checks are required for radiation sickness once every week (though by then an unprotected, unmodified human is long dead).

The poisonous atmosphere can kill quickly; exposure checks for stun damage are made once per minute. Fortunately, a simple respirator mask provides adequate protection. Even so, the high atmospheric pressure imposes checks every hour (once per day with a respirator mask).

An e-suit (soft or hard) nullifies the effect of radiation, toxic and high-pressure air, and temperature; however, it doesn't compensate for the high gravity. Additional information on adventuring in Corazón's G4/R2/A3/P4/H3 environment is in "The Graph System" in *Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action of the Gamemaster Guide*.

KROATH ON CORAZÓN

Even the powerful kroath are not immune to the effects of the environment. While they can survive the depths of

interplanetary vacuum in their armored suits, they did not evolve the capability to deal with the conditions on a hell-world such as this. Their suits easily handle the heat and radiation and atmosphere, but they have no answer to the crushing gravity.

Kroath can be seen wandering over the planet in half-crouches and crawls. Like humans, they rest fully prone on the ground whenever possible. It's something that Commodore Pfender can be thankful for; her enemies have no more natural mobility than the Legionnaires.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Despite the intolerable climate, the world has a unique weather system, with winds, storms, and even hurricanes and tornadoes. The surface has seas to fuel the inclement weather, and the planet's rotation rate generates high winds that further energize the weather systems in a struggle to equalize the temperature.

With chaotic and unpredictable winds in excess of 200 kph—sometimes reaching twice that speed in exceptional storms—there is little that humans can do but seek shelter, whether in cave, mine, or dome. Attempting to pilot a skycar or even a spaceship in Corazón's winds results in frequent spins and crashes; there is a base +3 penalty to all Vehicle Operation skill checks, plus an additional +1 penalty for each

CORAZÓN POPULATION 1,053 SENTIENTS¹

Human	98%		
Orion	0%	Austrin	0%
Thuldan	71%	Nariac	0%
Orlamu	0%	Insight	0%
Rigunmor	4%	Hatire	0%
Solar	0%	Borealin	0%
VoidCorp	0%	StarMech	0%
Independent ²	23%	Concord	2%
Alien ³	2%		
Sesheyan	5%	T'sa	14%
Mechalus	48%	Weren	23%
Fraal	10%		

¹ Does not include Thuldan military personnel recently deployed to the system.

² Predominantly of Sothvec origin

³ Does not include kroath.

additional 50 kph of wind velocity over 200 kph. Making ranged attacks in these conditions is equally challenging; double all penalties for range. Even near the ground, the high winds play havoc. Unless the attacker is somehow sheltered or stabilized, double all penalties for medium- and long-range attacks.

Corazón's venerable domes have survived for 150 years. Not surprisingly, their once silvery and reflective exteriors are now pockmarked with numerous patchy repairs. By now, just keeping the domes running is a major part of the planetary economy; one in ten Vieronites is directly involved with infrastructure maintenance.

TAVIRA

Honoring Tavira or any of the settlements on Corazón with the title of "city" is generous. Home to only 500 Vieronites, Tavira is more like a fledgling colony that never grew.

While never the most populous settlement, Tavira has always been home to the Vieronite government. Until a few months ago, that government was a council of ten annually elected Vieronites. From among their membership, the councilors chose a mayor to represent the Vieronites to outsiders and act as chief executive. The mayor, in turn, appointed a manager of each city to handle dome infrastructure, act as police commissioner, and take care of any local issues. For the lack of a real judiciary, the managers were also the arbiters of disputes. In Tavira, though, the presence of the mayor watching and issuing commands made that city's manager more of a functionary and a bureaucrat than an executive.

The current mayor is Isaac Levy (Hm/Independent/NP). His appointee, Daphne Theodorakis (Hf/Independent/TO-

5) is the manager of Tavira. She was chosen to be its chief engineer more than anything else; maintenance on its water recyclers and gravity generators has fallen significantly behind.

Today, Levy acknowledges he is no longer the true leader of the planet. That title, along with all real power over the humans on Corazón, belongs to Commodore Pfender. Pfender leaves most day-to-day dealings with the civilian populace to Levy, just as she leaves direct management of the Legionnaires to Centurion Model. Important decisions remain her province, however. She sets the order of battle, decides priority for colonial resources, and has even stepped in on occasion to mediate disputes between the frightened and frustrated citizens of Tavira.

THE DOME

The city's dome measures about 400 meters in diameter at its base and stretches some 100 meters tall. While that seems ridiculously small to Arrivers used to the megapolises of the Stellar Ring or even Bluefall, there's a lot of available space. The dome was designed to hold more than 2,000 inhabitants; with only 500 Vieronites there now (plus 51 Thuldans), most live in roomy comfort, occupying twice the space the Sothvec designers had envisioned. Nevertheless, fully one-fourth of Tavira is considered abandoned. No one lives within those sections, which have had their power and water disconnected. Today, those areas receive more visitors than they have in decades, due to patrols of Vieronites and Thuldans.

The dome is divided into three levels, each about 30 meters in height. The lowest is home to private residences and what Tavira has to offer for a commercial district: about five shops. The second level houses the dome's tiny spaceport and several government buildings. It's also where most of the Legionnaires bunk when not on duty. The third level is dominated by machinery: atmospheric processors, temperature regulators, and gravity generators.

ACCESS

A total of five entrances historically allowed passage to and from Tavira. Today, that number has been reduced to two. Only one of the four sealed airlocks on the ground still functions regularly. The others are welded shut and barricaded by cranes, machinery, and anything else the inhabitants could find. Pfender approved the decision to reduce the number of entrances, although for tactical reasons she recently began rotating which airlock is in use, so as not to invite a kroath ambush at a known egress. A few hundred person-hours of labor are used up each week to clear one airlock and seal another. Effectively, these reinforced hatchways have Good toughness and an average of 10 durability points.

The only other access point is the through the spaceport hangar doors on the second level of the dome.

ITV MANTICORE

Compartments: 4 Dur: 20
 Maneuver Rating: 0 Acc: 2 Mpp
 Cruise Speed: 1.5 AU/hour Berthing: 18 crew/2 passengers

Armament: Mass cannon
 Defenses: Deflection inducer, jammer
 Armor: Moderate neutronite (2 dur) d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)
 Computer: Ordinary computer core, Ordinary dedicated battle, navigation, and sensor computers
 Engines: Induction engine
 Power: Mass reactor rated for 10 power factors
 Drive: None
 Hatches: Security (0 dur)

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1-4	Command	Command deck (0/0) Mass cannon (2/3) Jammer (0/1) Deflection inducer (1/2) Multiband radar (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/1) Reentry capsule (0/0) Airlock (0/0) Ordinary computer core (1/0)	8/8/4
5-7	Engineering	Induction engine (2/2) Autosupport unit (0/1) Mass reactor (4/*)	12/12/6
8-12	Crew	Crew quarters (3/0) Passenger suite (1/0)	8/8/4
13-20	Cargo	Autocargo (4/0)	8/8/4

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Mass cannon	0	5/10/15	LI (p)	d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w	3

Commodore Pfender's personal shuttle was converted from duty on the line eight years ago. The imperial line of *Pestilence*-class cutters is slowly being phased out of service, but the commodore made extensive modifications to the vessel's components, removing two weapon systems, in order to make room for plenty of crew and cargo space.

Generally, it takes only a crew of three to operate the vessel. The rest of the crew space is reserved for Pfender's personal aides, seconds, and the escort of Legionnaires she carries with her. Typically, that's only five or so soldiers; when she came to the surface with most of the *Total Commitment's* infantry contingent, she had no idea how fortunate the decision would be. Even though the 52 Legionnaires were stacked up within the *Manticore* like cordwood, they fit well enough for the short journey. That makes the *Manticore* a likely tool for Pfender to deliver her Legionnaires to the battlefield.

SPACEPORT

Unless they had no other choice, no starship ever came to Corazón for repairs. The hangar bays on Tavira's second level are minimal compared to any serious spaceport, serving only vessels of light freighter size or smaller. At best, they could hold a total of only 80 or so ship durability points. It's a tight fit just for the four Thuldian space fighters and the Commodore's shuttle, the *ITV Manticore*. It's rare, however, for all of those ships to be at rest at any given time. Pfender schedules regular patrols near both of the remaining human settlements.

In addition to the spaceships, the hangar bay was also designed to house the planetbound vehicles used by the local Vieronites. Four sky-cars are privately owned by citizens of Tavira, and the Vieronite government owns an additional two skycars and two skytrucks used to carry cargo.

For the Thuldian space fighters and the Commodore's shuttle, the small size of the spaceport isn't the real obstacle; rather, it's the limited amount of electronics, ship components, spare parts, and even ship-grade metal plating. Because of these limits, the Thuldians must be extra careful not to damage their vessels.

At the moment, the Tavira miniport has only 46 repair points. This means that only a total of 46 points of wound damage or 23 points of mortal damage to ships, or any combination thereof, can be repaired (see "Spaceports" in *Chapter 1: Expanding Play of the Starships* accessory). Not surprisingly, Commodore Pfender has ordered the Thuldian pilots to withdraw from any engagement that's likely to result in serious damage, much less actual losses.

Five technicians (nonprofessionals) staff the hangar bay, with average skill scores of 12 in Technical Science-*repair*. Thanks to the facility's fine equipment (-2 step bonus to skill checks) the Vieronite repair crew manages its assignments with an efficiency that even Pfender has yet to complain of.

ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

Vital to the continued safety and operation of Tavira are the gravity generators. Nested in the third and highest level of the dome, they reduce Corazón's 4.4 g gravity to more reasonable levels. At the dome's base, gravity diminishes to a "mere" 2.8 g. On the second level, it's further

Tavira

SCALE
0m 30m 60m

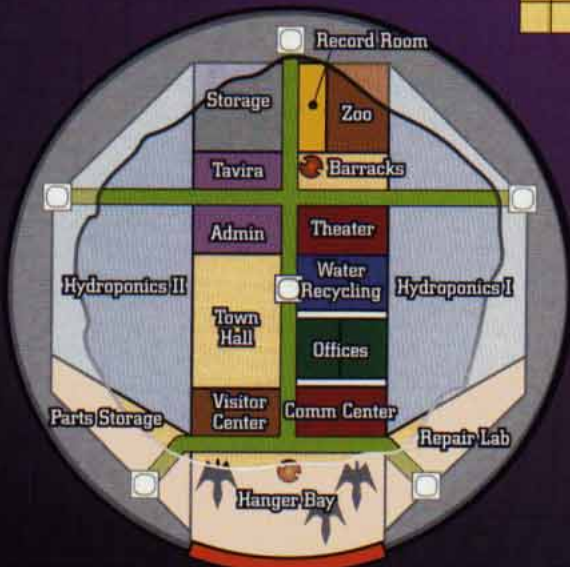
- Luxury Housing
- Housing
- Demolished Housing
- Unused Housing
- Shopping District
- Road
- Barricaded Airlock
- Primary Corridor
- Airlock
- Lift
- Guard Post
- Pfender's Residence
- Levy's Residence



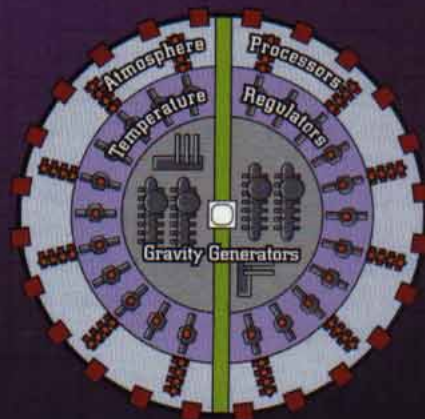
Level One/Habitation



Parking Zone



Level Two/Control



Level Three/Maintenance Machinery

reduced to 1.4g. When engineers ascend to the third level to service the generators or other life support machinery, they must deal with a perfect weightless, zero-g environment.

The heat regulators that cool the dome are filled with gas at temperatures near absolute zero. As a result, the third level is quite cold (consider it an H1 environment).

HYDROPONICS

Just over 50% of the food that the Vieronites need comes from vegetables and primitive plants grown within their own dome. An additional 5% of their diet is actually provided by plants native to Corazón. Though these may be primitive and offer no great advancement in culinary arts, they contain proteins and vitamins that humans can use.

The hydroponic facilities were never intended to be the only food source for the Vieronites. Outside traders brought food to Corazón each month and took away metals from Algeciras's mines. The reduced traffic of late has put pressure on the colony, though emergency supplies supplement the hydroponic foodstuffs to provide some margin of safety. Existing supplies are estimated to last about four months, given the current number of mouths to feed. The Vieronites and Thuldans hope that a relief force will have arrived by then, but secretly fear that the limits of their food supply may have little to do with their survival.

Gabor Ferenc (Hm/Independent/NP), an appointee of mayor Levy, is in charge of the hydroponic bay.

THE ZOO

An artifact of the early days of Sothvec colonialism, the zoo is located on the first level of Tavira's dome. Sothvec pride in adapting to foreign locales led to the creation of zoos such as this. The Sothvecs brought dozens of species to Corazón, including modified chimpanzees, gazelles, snails, dogs, wildcats, snakes, and brown bears.

While only two dozen animals have bred and survived until today, their presence puts additional pressure on the colony's limited supply of consumables. Keeping the animals alive is one of the few areas in which the colonists disagree with Pfender; the Vieronites refuse to concede to her more practical point of view. In only a month or less, though, it may come down to a choice between the humans and other sentients of Tavira, and their pets.

ALGECIRAS

For most practical purposes, Algeciras is Tavira's twin, housed in a dome of equal size and roughly equal composition. The settlement is mostly ignored, yet supports most of the

Vieronite economy. Sothvec Industries built Algeciras in the toughest and most inaccessible mountain chain they could find. Surrounded by volcanic dangers, it's also close to the largest deposits of heavy metals on the planet, thrown up from the depths of the mantle by fiery tectonic forces.

The internal structure of Algeciras reflects this difference in purpose. The lower level is mostly cargo space, providing room for the city's four skytrucks to maneuver. A single large cargo door allows access. The second level contains the homes for just over 500 Vieronites. Although the city is more lightly defended than Tavira, a dozen or so Legionnaires typically bunk here, assigned to protect Algeciras until Pfender calls for them. Optio Julianna Sauter is the senior military officer, but she doesn't have the presence or the rank to freely issue orders to the civilian populace. So, even though security is tight, many citizens of Algeciras pretend that life is normal. They work regular shifts in the mines, stockpiling ores of value to merchants—should anything resembling regular trading return to the Vieron system.

THULDAN SPACE FIGHTER

Compartments: 2
Maneuver Rating: -1
Cruise Speed: 2 AU/hour
Dur: 10
Acc: 3 Mpp
Berthing: 2 crew

Armament: Plasma cannon
Defenses: Deflection inducer
Armor: Moderate neutronite (1 dur) d6+1 (LJ), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)
Computer: Marginal computer core
Engines: Microinductor
Power: Microinductor rated for 4 power factors, accumulator
Drive: None
Hatches: Standard (0 dur)

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1-6	Command	Command deck (0/0) Plasma cannon (3/3) Deflection inducer (1/2) Multiband radar (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/1) EM detector (0/0) Airlock (0/0) Reentry capsule (0/0) Marginal computer core (0/0)	8/8/4
7-20	Engineering	Microinductor (4/**) Accumulator (1/**) Autosupport unit (0/1)	10/10/5

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Plasma cannon	0	4/8/16	En (e)	d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m	3



When in full operation, the mines can pry several kilotons of raw ore daily from Corazón's surface, but that rate has declined to a hundred kilograms or so. Most of the mining population has been conscripted to patrol the city, shore up its defenses, or join the skirmishing parties that venture into the outlands.

JAÉN

Citizens of Tavira and Algeciras looking to relax couldn't do better than a visit to lovely Jaén. The last of the three settlements to be built on Corazón, Jaén profited from the experiences of engineers and designers building on the difficult planet. Externally, it's of nearly equal size and structure to the other cities. Within this dome, though, was a luxury and opulence that couldn't be matched elsewhere on the planet. Jaén had the best technical crew, the best machinery, and the most comfortable living space of any of the domes. Unlike Tavira and Algeciras, its gravity generators never experienced the occasional failure or malfunction. Even its hydroponic facility was rumored to produce better-tasting food. For all these reasons, more Vieronites came to live in Jaén than anywhere else.

Today, though, visiting the planet's jeweled city is the last thing that a Vieronite would wish for—at least, not without

a few hundred armed and armored companions. The kroath own Jaén now, and if anyone survived their assault, they've never been seen by human eyes since. Pfender posts scouts as close to Jaén as she dares, and she'd very much like to insert a few Legionnaires into the dome to get a look around.

In theory, that shouldn't be too difficult. When they came down to Jaén, the kroath paid the city little respect, blasting numerous holes into the dome's walls. There are rents as wide as 6 meters that would still offer ways to sneak in, if not for the patrolling kroath and the spheres that lie just outside the dome when not flying in raids or missions.

As a result of those tears in the dome, Jaén's internal environment differs little from the outside. Temperature, atmosphere, and heat are those of the surface, and radiation leaks in with the air. About the only things that still work in Jaén are the gravity generators; apparently the kroath also prefer a lower gravity than 4.4g. One Thuldan plan calls for the destruction of Jaén's gravity generators, if only to annoy the kroath. It's an expensive and irreversible decision, but a small sacrifice in the greater scheme.

KROATH

An estimated 200 kroath spend most of their time inside Jaén, going about tasks that Vieronites might find eerily

familiar. They busily fortify the city, closing off access points within the dome. Rather than sealing hatches, the kroath allow small parties to penetrate the dome and ambush them in its battered corridors and buildings. A few kroath have been seen lurking in its halls, apparently waiting for the chance to throw themselves into combat.

Kroath leadership has yet to be identified by the human inhabitants, who are not certain it even exists. In fact, the kroath do answer to a single commander, although they can freely communicate and come to reasoned decisions on their own. The commander directs the raids and scouting patrols and orchestrates Jaén's defenses. Individual unit leaders have some ability to coordinate small numbers of kroath, but those units wouldn't work effectively together without the commander. Although it isn't the ultimate source of their orders—it receives directives from a greater authority—its removal would reduce the kroath's effectiveness immensely.

THE UNINHABITED PLANETS

The second world of the Vieron system was the only one colonized for a simple reason: it's the only terrestrial planet with an atmosphere at all, let alone one that's at least marginally breathable.

Infierno, the first world, lost its air to Vieron's overpowering heat and solar wind. A classic

KROATH DROPSHIP

Compartments: 3	Dur: 15
Maneuver Rating: 0	Acc: 2 Mpp
Cruise Speed: 2 AU/hour	Berthing: 18 crew
Armament: Mass cannon	
Defenses: Jammer	
Armor: Moderate (unknown) (1 dur) d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6+2 (En)	
Computer: Marginal computer core	
Engines: Kroath engine (specifics unknown)	
Power: Kroath plant (specific unknown) rated for 13 power factors	
Drive: None	
Hatches: Standard (0 dur)	

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1-5	Command	Command deck (0/0) Mass cannon (2/3) Jammer (0/1) Multiband radar (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/1) Reentry capsule (0/0) Marginal computer core (1/0)	4/4/2
6-11	Engineering	Kroath engine (3/3) Autosupport unit (0/1) Kroath plant (6/*)	18/18/9
12-20	Crew	Crew quarters (3/0) Airlock (0/0)	6/6/3

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Mass cannon	0	5/10/15	LI (p)	d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w	3

A NIGHTMARE COME TRUE

Rumors swirl around the kroath. For the last two years, unsubstantiated stories of kroath abductions have appeared on the Grid, without attracting attention from the major news servers. The claim is that the kroath are in fact humans or other humanoid sentients encased in the gel-filled armor.

Pfender heard such tales before she came to Vieron, and her first raid on Jaén concealed a mission more important than simply testing the kroath defenses. She assigned Centurion Model a simple task that, according to the Galactic Concord, all others had failed in: Capture a kroath. He succeeded in part; he didn't manage to save the kroath's life, but he was able to use freezing gases from Tavira's heat regulators to prevent its suit's self-destructive acidic reaction.

Pfender knows now that the rumors are true. The kroath bioarmor protected tissue unmistakably human in origin, although the genetic coding didn't match any

known records in the Vieronite colonial database. Just how this human got into the suit, and why he or she was on Corazón, remains a mystery. Two attempts to contact the kroath since this discovery have failed.

The secret, like the body, remains in the hands of Pfender, Model, and a few Vieronites who examined the corpse. The civilian populace, including the mayor, have been kept in the dark. Pfender sees no reason to create additional alarm. Knowledge of the kroath's genesis wouldn't help the Vieronites fight them any better and could damage morale. The Vieronites have already resigned themselves to deaths of friends and family in Jaén. Who knows how they might deal with the possibility of seeing them again, wearing bioarmor and carrying dark plasma weapons? Now Pfender's fear is that the thousand Vieronites of Jaén might have been converted to the kroath cause.

KROATH COMMANDER**Level 14 kroath Combat Spec**

STR 12 (+1) INT 12 (+1)
 DEX 13 (+2) WIL 10 (0)
 CON 14 PER 10
 Durability: 14/14/7/7 Action check: 17+/16/8/4
 Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6 #Actions: 3
 Reaction score: Good/3 Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Claws 16/8/4 d4+1w/d4+3w/d6+4w LI/O
 Dark plasma rifle 18/9/4 d8+1w/2d6w/2d6+3w En/G
 Filament chain 16/8/4 d6+2w/2d4+2w/3d4+3w LI/G
 Enraged Provides a -2 bonus to all attacks and action checks for d6+1 rounds; can be activated once per scene.

Defenses

Armor: d8+2 (LI), d6+2 (HI), d8+2 (En)
 Biotech Gel: Heals 1 stun and 1 wound point per phase; if kroath is rendered unconscious or if any mortal points have been lost, the gel becomes a powerful acid and destroys both the kroath and the armor.

Skills

Armor [12]-powered [16]; Athletics [12]-throw [13];
 Melee [12]-powered [16]; Unarmed [12]-brawl [16];
 Modern [13]-pistol [14], rifle [18]; Stealth [13]-sneak [16];
 Vehicle [13]-space [16]; Movement [14]; Stamina [14]-endurance [18];
 resist pain [16]; Knowledge [12]-language: Kroath [15];
 System Operation [12]; Tactics [12]-infantry [16]; Awareness [10]-perception [12];
 Leadership [10].

The kroath commander in the Vieron system is a very formidable opponent, both as the leader of hundreds of kroath and personally, when it becomes involved itself. For decades, this kroath has accumulated battle experience against humans and other species. Battle is its life; it has no memories or knowledge prior to its genesis and joining the kroath campaign.

The first step towards defeating the kroath might be to remove their commander. However, given its armor, enrage power, and high skill scores, this external should pose a significant challenge to an entire group of heroes. The kroath commander bears the scars of many battles on its green bioarmor; Commodore Plender and Centurion Model continually fight against its extensive knowledge of tactics.

Mercurian world, Inferno is tide-locked to the star and, geologically speaking, doomed.

The system's third, fourth, and fifth worlds, all located in or near a more habitable band, were simply unlucky. Complex gravitic harmonics allowed these three small planets to achieve stability, but because of their small size, they were unable to retain whatever atmosphere they had during the star system's formation.

Jovian gas giants fill the distant reaches of the system, where the warmth and gravity of Vieron begin to taper off. While varying in size and mass, each sweeps the outer system, gradually collecting hydrogen, helium, and the stray comet—thus protecting the settled inner system.

SYSTEM LOG

Although the activities of the kroath dominate the small local news servers, the rest of the Verge is only now slowly learning about what's happening in Vieron. The Galactic Concord found out when the *Storm Delay* arrived in Aegis; the CIB, Star Force, Marines, and Administrators all received updates. Much of the rest of the Verge is blithely unaware of the kroath threat; until more is known, the Concord wishes to avoid the damage that a panic could cause.

Unlike the Thuldans, the Galactic Concord has elected to try a more measured and careful course. No ship since the *Storm Delay* has yet emerged from Vieron, so the Concord sent two scouts into the outer edge of the system to report their findings. When neither returned, the Concord was at a loss what direction to take and is still undecided on how to allot its forces. Meanwhile, the loss of contact with Vieron has raised Concord military readiness throughout the region. The Thuldan Empire, despite its fiery proclamations, is in a similar state. Neither stellar nation wants to write off the Vergers of Vieron, but neither do they want to risk critical naval assets in the distant star system.

ADVENTURE HOOKS: TRUST SOMEONE?

The Vieronites cherish the Thuldans as their saviors. It's taken for granted that, should they survive the next few months and push the kroath out, the Vieronites would happily become a protectorate of the Empire. That does not mean, of course, that they completely trust the imperials. They've heard too many bad things, and history records too many stories of the Legions' aggression. So, even as mayor Isaac Levy bows to every one of Commodore Pfender's orders, he keeps his own secrets.

One of these lies within Tavira's hangar bay. Several months ago, a rundown drive trader descended to Corazón for repairs. While the ship's crew visited Jaén, the technical staff went to work disassembling the venerable old tradeship. By May, the work was half complete, and the trader's components lay strewn all about. Then came the kroath, and the crew in Jaén is presumed dead.

The tech crew services the Thuldan space fighters during their regular shift, but Levy also has them working after hours on the trader. Now, as the ship begins to come together, he just needs the control chips that the ship's captain took with him to Jaén.

BACKGROUND

Somehow the heroes stumbled into the Vieron system, and like everyone else here, they have no way to get out. Maybe they booked a civilian passage and Vieron was just a way station to somewhere else. Their ship was lucky to make it to Corazón; most strays don't. Prior to this adventure, they may have worked with the Legionnaires in patrols or defensive actions; at any rate, Pfender would quickly recognize a group of heroes as another asset she can use. And so would mayor Levy.

Levy's been reluctant to use any of his people for this mission—it's obviously risky, for one thing, and few of them possess the skills to have a chance. He also doesn't trust the Legionnaires; he fears that with a driveship, they may either make a quick exit from the system or decide to use the reassembled trader in dangerous military engagements. As to what Levy wants it for, who knows? Maybe it's for his own escape, sending a message out, or even for use as a relief ship to transport out 50 or so of the youngest or weakest noncombatants.

The heroes' mission is obvious: Go to kroath-held Jaén and search the bodies of the dead for the lost trader captain, or the captain's personal quarters on the first level of Jaén's dome. Levy believes it unlikely

ly that the kroath will have bothered to scavenge the inhabitants' personal belongings.

GETTING THERE'S THE EASY PART

As noted in the "Jaén" section above, getting into the city isn't impossible for a small party or tactical team. Indeed, the kroath sometimes note the entrance of small groups but don't interfere—at least, not until the intruders are safely within the dome.

Once they're inside, let the heroes see just how impossible their mission is. Jaén's pretty much in ruins, and finding even a specific individual's quarters, let alone a few tiny control chips, will be like looking for the proverbial needle—without being able to burn the haystack. Likely scenes include encounters with kroath patrols (which will involve hiding and fighting); attempting to activate the disabled city computer to find the captain's quarters; and possibly using the captain's comm gear to home in on his body's position.

There are several ways to resolve the adventure, depending on just what terrible machinations you want the kroath to orchestrate in your campaign. Who knows what the heroes could discover and feel moved to do? Anything can happen: Perhaps one of their number is captured and must be rescued. Maybe the heroes discover one of the kroath to be the converted ship captain, now in the service of the enemy. They could also stumble on a treasure trove of discarded human effects: jewelry, handheld electronic devices, personal credit readers—and the control chips. However you play it, though, the final escape from Jaén should be a harrowing experience for those that survive.

Whether or not they return with the chips, Commodore Pfender will be waiting for the heroes. Her scouts observed their penetration of Jaén's dome, and she wants to know why they went in without telling her. What's worth taking such a risk?

SUPPORTING CAST

For this adventure, you may want to fill out the personality of mayor Levy, nonprofessional though he is, and determine his scores in skills such as Interaction—*charm* or even Deception. Should the drive trader come into play, you can use the trader-class starship template provided in *Chapter 12: Vehicles* of the *Player's Handbook* or one of the plans in *Chapter 3: Ships and Deck Plans* in the *Starships* accessory. Once the heroes enter Jaén, you'll probably need the kroath statistics from the *Externals* chapter in the *Alien Compendium*.

When people speak of "the lost colonies of the Verge," no place comes more to mind than Tychus. Many Verge systems, with rightful indignation, deeply resent the patrons that abandoned them. Verge worlds had, at most, a couple of decades to establish themselves. After that, they were suddenly left on their own, abandoned. Perhaps if they had seen it coming, more Verge worlds would have been prepared. As it was, dozens of settlements withered up and died.

The others, larger and better-equipped, fell back on trade within the Verge's confines. Even if they didn't fully trust one another, Vergers came to rely on other Vergers. The forgotten souls of Tychus did not gain such a benefit. Ignored even by their closest neighbors, they had no one to help them. Today, no one can blame them for their bitterness or their eagerness to embrace the greater galaxy.

Tychus is a cool star some seven or eight billion years old—a K2 still in the prime of its stellar life. This orange star is accompanied by a total of thirteen planets—in addition to a single, unremarkable belt of asteroids in close orbit. Of all these planets, only the second planet, Yellow Sky, has been colonized.

PREHISTORY

Prior to 2336, the history of Tychus, much as any other unexplored system, is unknown. Evidence on its second planet points to a civilization that once called Yellow Sky home. Known by humanity as the Stoneburners, little is known of their history in Tychus, or what became of them. Dating techniques employed in the last few years place the origin of some Stoneburner artifacts at around 340 million years ago. But the science of Stoneburners study is in its infancy.

No comparative history exists for humanity for this period, either. Amphibians had just made their appearance on Earth; even reptiles didn't exist. It was the Carboniferous era: the fantastic dinosaurs were more than 50 million years away, mammals more than 100 million. The geography of Earth was similarly alien, with misshapen continents beginning to form Pangaea.

As for the other sentients of the galaxy, none of them have any record of this period. The fraal had yet to embark on the long journey into the stars that would lead them to Earth, and the t'sa had yet to evolve into the distinct form we know today.

Without factual information, this ancient past of the Yellow Sky has become the subject of legend. Denizens of the planet have offered conjecture about the Stoneburners for almost a century. In the last five years, their interest has infected the Verge and many beyond. Treasure hunters, biologists, xenoarchaeologists, history buffs, and religious zealots have all come

to Yellow Sky to find—or make up—the truth. The Ancientist religious movement is only the most famous and numerous of the newcomers.

HISTORY

Orlamu Captain Victor Khosti led the first exploratory expedition of the Tychus system in 2336. Mission orders from the Orlamu Theocracy were to find a world in the distant sector of space called the Verge suitable for colonization. The Theocracy had an interest in watching the region

after it gained the attention of so many other empires, but no real interest in putting significant resources behind it. So when Khosti's medium guided the OSS *Cizre* back to Hopewell, the expedi-

tion's sponsoring planet in the Theocracy, from its discovery in Tychus, it took more than a decade for the Orlamu bureaucracy to issue orders for the colonization. Volunteers boarded ship and departed.

OSS *Kurtalan* and OSS *Adana* left Theocracy space in the winter of 2345, bound for Tychus. The larger of the two ships, the *Kurtalan*, carried most of the colonists and the construction facilities. The OSS *Adana* bore enough supplies, equipment, and other materials to last until additional resupply ships were to return ten years later. The two vessels arrived together in February of 2346, following a direct route that bypassed the populated systems of the region. They unloaded their cargo and watched as Mount Illumination was built. Then they departed for the Stellar Ring.

CHAPTER

TYCHUS



They were never seen again. Presumably destroyed in one of the first skirmishes of GW2, no record of their existence remains after the starfall at Tychus. The commissioners on Hopewell had no clue to their colonists' fate—even whether the ships ever got their people to where they were going. Hopewell's prelate sent a vessel out in 2350—but it too disappeared into the war's maelstrom and was never seen again. Then the concerns of war took over, and Orlamu neutrality was shattered by raids from

PREVIOUS REFERENCES

The Tychus star system was introduced in the *STAR*DRIVE* campaign setting with a short description of its history and its two most significant worlds. The *Alien Compendium* adds additional information on species living on Yellow Sky. Gamemasters and players may want to review that information before reading over this section.

TABLE 9: TYCHUS SYSTEM

	Neighbor	Yellow Sky	Pale Ton	Rickson	
Primary	Tychus	Tychus	Tychus	Tychus	
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 2	Class 4	Class 5	
Gravity	G1 (0.38 g)	G2 (1.14 g)	G1 (0.39 g)	G4 (2.39 g)	
Radiation	R3 (21 rem/day)	R2 (3 rem/week)	R3 (15 rem/day)	R3 (24 rem/day)	
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A2-3 (N ₂ , O ₂ , Cl)	A0 (vacuum)	A2 (H, He)	
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P3-4 (1.4-9.0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P5 (gas giant)	
Heat	H3 (80.4°C)	H2-3 (48.4°C)	H1 (-85.2°C)	H1 (-169°C)	
Orbital Distance	0.31 AU	0.62 AU	1.15 AU	2.60 AU	
Diameter	4,620 km	15,076 km	5,420 km	148,200 km	
Year	71.8 days	203.2 days	513.3 days	4.78 years	
Day	12.36 days	30.69 hours	14.0 hours	7.9 hours	
Axial Tilt	0.1°	4.4°	0.9°	38.7°	
Density	1.05	0.97	0.91	0.21	
# Satellites	0	3	0	21	
	Dull Regret	Summerdown	Red Earth	Backlog	
Primary	Tychus	Tychus	Tychus	Tychus	
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 4	Class 4	Class 4	
Gravity	G1 (0.38 g)	G1 (0.63 g)	G1 (0.33 g)	G1 (0.42 g)	
Radiation	R3 (14 rem/day)	R3 (22 rem/day)	R3 (31 rem/day)	R3 (39 rem/day)	
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	
Heat	H1(-172°C)	H1 (-112°C)	H0 (-207°C)	H0 (-211°C)	
Orbital Distance	3.84 AU	5.39 AU	8.26 AU	9.50 AU	
Diameter	7,688 km	11,200 km	7,418 km	6,204 km	
Year	8.58 years	14.26 years	27.05 years	33.37 years	
Day	181.1 hours	34.1 days	21.6 hours	17.0 hours	
Axial Tilt	19°	2.6°	25.9°	6.9°	
Density	0.64	1.22	0.56	0.87	
# Satellites	0	2	0	1	
	Sealshine	Big Heat	Bluecharm	Dystopia	Blackball
Primary	Tychus	Tychus	Tychus	Tychus	Tychus
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 5	Class 4	Class 4	Class 4
Gravity	G1 (0.78g)	G2 (1.06 g)	G1 (0.38 g)	G1 (0.58 g)	G0 (0.18 g)
Radiation	R3 (28 rem/day)	R3 (43 rem/day)	R3 (11 rem/day)	R3 (21 rem/day)	R3 (48 rem/day)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A1 (H ₂ , He)	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P5 (gas giant)	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)
Heat	H0 (-219°C)	H0 (-231.4°C)	H0 (-230°C)	H0 (-235°C)	H0 (-238°C)
Orbital Distance	11.27 AU	16.35 AU	22.24 AU	28.75 AU	33.93 AU
Diameter	10,238 km	122,000 km	5,485 km	6,276 km	4,267 km
Year	43.11 years	75.33 years	119.5 years	175.7 years	225.2 years
Day	38.5 hours	13.4 hours	16.5 hours	41.5 hours	7.7 hours
Axial Tilt	64.2°	21.4°	0°	19.1°	32.0°
Density	0.97	0.11	0.88	1.17	0.53
# Satellites	4	8	1	0	0

various stellar nations, culminating in the destruction of Hopewell itself in 2369. Though they would not be able to confirm it for another century, the people of Yellow Sky were orphans.

Meanwhile, no one outside the system knew that anyone lived on Tychus.

CAPTIVES

The Orlamu dug in and set up their colony, unaware of their own refugee status. Eight years passed before the colony's leaders realized just how much trouble they were in. While the first survey made it clear that local flora on the planetary highlands could provide sustenance, technological support was the real premium. The Orlamu hadn't brought along much of an industrial base around which to build, and worse, they had only a couple of weaponless systemships—no driveships at all, no means to allow the Divine Unconscious to offer guidance or escape.

TECHNOLOGY ON THE RISE

Only the people of Yellow Sky can attest to the problems of a society deprived of the technology it relied upon. Electricity provided by steam power or the burning of wood hasn't proven perfectly reliable, and until an Orlamu municipal mass reactor arrives next year, the situation won't improve.

Thanks to the arrival of six bulk transports since 2497, the colonists' immediate needs have been met. Medical supplies and instruments were the first to arrive. Antiaging gene therapy and advanced medical treatment have resumed on the planet; just about every citizen has been visiting a physician once a month for examination and the initiation of a steady medical program. After medical needs, the Orlamu began to deliver resources, computers, technological components, and the like.

Unfortunately, the benign Orlamu philanthropists paid little attention to warnings about the troubled nature of shipping in the Verge. Fully half of the ships bound for Tychus never arrived; thus the restoration of 26th-century technology to Yellow Sky is far behind schedule. That's especially true among the smaller agricultural communities outside of Mount Illumination, but even within the city the colonists continue to rely on methods and sciences invented and improvised during the Long Silence.

A source of more widespread modernization has been the steady influx of visitors to Yellow Sky. Most visitors arrive with money to spend. Concord dollars used to buy services in Mount Illumination can in turn buy from other Verge worlds those goods that the colonists need. Until a more complete revision of the Yellow Sky infrastructure, the technology rise depends on the tourism industry.

A few attempts to call for help went out during the Long Silence. The colonists sent out a series of radio messages, most of them aimed for Aegis. No answer came. It took a couple of decades for the suspicion that no one knew of the colony to become accepted. More bizarre theories—some involving the complete destruction of humanity by its own hands—grew in popularity. Of course, the Orlamu did their best to survive, constructing farms and small settlements outside of Mount Illumination. But as years rolled by, the colonists' advanced technology—gravity lifts, skycars, and everything else—began to fail. As the people lost more and more of their technology, they were forced into a lifestyle that resembled that of preindustrial Earth.

The population dwindled, the colony losing almost a third from its original number of 35,000 by the dawn of the 25th century. Without the benefit of cellular and molecular medicine, life expectancies plummeted. During the Long Silence, they reached an unheard of low of sixty-seven, only a third of what their parents expected. The survivors developed some interesting ideas about the nature of the Divine Unconscious. The weren among the colonists fared best, many of them more accustomed to a lack of technology. The weren helped the community survive on a world without mechanical contrivances.

The first driveship in the Tychus system for seventy years appeared, by chance, in 2414. The *Jacland*, an independent freighter passing through on its way elsewhere, stopped in the system and was immediately hailed as a savior. The traders, however, had other ideas. Recognizing a unique opportunity—a 'captive market'—the ship never reported the existence of the Yellow Sky colony to other Vergers. Instead, for next sixty years, the captain and crew of the *Jacland* gouged the Orlamu, coming by every year to deliver a few meager supplies in exchange for valuable ores that the freighter's owner insisted the Orlamu mine. When the freighter visited the system, its crew had complete dominion over the Orlamu, and the indignities they rendered upon the bodies and spirits of the colonists will not be soon forgotten.

As draconian as the freighter's practices may have been, as much as the Orlamu might want vengeance for its villainy, its annual shipments of a few tons of supplies may have made the difference between survival and extinction for the Yellow Sky colonists.

THE RETURN

The Orlamu of Yellow Sky knew nothing of the Kendai relay's reconstruction, or of the CSS *Monitor*'s tour through the Verge. It was left to an Orlamu junior bureaucrat, finding some mention of Tychus in a venerable survey file, to order a mission to resurvey the system and determine if it was still suitable for colonization. The crew of the OSS *Nabulas* couldn't have been more surprised when they found some 25,000 Orlamu on the planet.

114
TYCHUS

As for the Orlamu colonists, the emotions ranged from disbelief to joy. All of the original colonists and their direct descendants, forced to live without modern medicine or antiaging gene therapy, had passed away. The fourth and fifth generation of colonists were now in their prime, and many of them had abandoned thoughts of ever leaving. That changed in an instant. A relief ship arrived a couple of months later to provide emergency supplies, thanks to a generous donation of the Concord and the Theocracy. More ships began to come: other Vergers, other traders, and journalists who wondered what life in the most isolated system was like after so long. Meanwhile, more than five thousand colonists seized the first opportunity to get out, in 2497 departing for Bluefall or parts beyond, happy to have humanity's oft-spoken-of progress at their fingertips.

TODAY

In days since, the population of Yellow Sky stabilized at around 25,000. Many of the colonists knew nothing of life outside of Tychus, and they had a natural reluctance to leave behind the only life they knew. Besides, with the promise of advanced technology to deliver them from their primitive lives, Yellow Sky didn't look all that bad.

The Orlamu Theocracy immediately pressed for recognition of its governance of Tychus. Given no objection from the colonists, the Concord agreed to the claim. Without a patron, the Yellow Sky settlement was just as likely to fall apart again. The Committee on Verge Integration advised the Theocracy to see to the humanitarian needs of the human and weren populace as soon as possible—or else the Concord would step in. But the Theocracy needed no urging; First Prophet Galindus himself delivered an encyclical on the 2498 New Year, welcoming the lost children back into the fold.

In its first year, more than three dozen light, medium, and bulk freighters, most of them loaded with relief supplies, reached Yellow Sky, the product of donations from the Theocracy and benevolent Verge communities. Slowly, the free aid tapered off, to be replaced a by steady flow of merchants coming to Tychus to trade or sell merchandise. To this day, many merchants find Yellow Sky a fantastic market for old electronics and other out-of-date technology; even though these items are obsolete, the Orlamu colonists are hungry for whatever they can get their hands on. A decade behind means nothing to farmers relying on steam-powered plows and muscle-driven scythes for harvesting. In addition, the fifth-generation colonists have little experience with modern technology, so the older equipment is easier for them to maintain. An enterprising t'sa merchant has even made a modest business of scavenging scrapyards for old equipment, refurbishing it, and teaching the colonists how to maintain it.

DOWN INTO YESTERDAY

In 2500, a mixed group of colonists, visiting Orlamu researchers, and a pair of Concord officers completed the first successful expedition to explore one of the Precursor sites down in the chlorine-heavy valleys of Yellow Sky. The report of this first expedition provides most of the information presently known about these Precursors. Indeed, it was this expedition that gave the ancient culture of mineral manipulators their name—the Stoneburners. While the mission itself proved successful, four members of the survey team were killed and several others injured, including Aliisz Veras, one of the Concord officers on the mission.

Among the most interesting of the team's discoveries was a pyramidal artifact of solid black stone, 3 meters wide at the base and only 20 kg in weight. It radiated energy along a wide spectrum but didn't seem to present a short-term risk. When the team excavated the object, the broken ribs and punctured lung of Aliisz Veras, along with the wounds of every other injured crewmate, suddenly healed over. Broken bones knit, hemorrhaging ceased—all within moments. Suddenly revitalized, the pioneers made a quick retreat to Mount Illumination.

Despite the mission's success, it raised far more questions than it answered. Who were the Stoneburners? Where did they come from? What was their society like? Examination of the site and its defenses indicates that the Stoneburners were either a conquering race or they had terrifying enemies, but insufficient evidence exists to support either possibility conclusively. The explorers were amazed to discover that the site's defensive systems were still active after what they estimated to be nearly 340 million years. What does this say about their technology?

The public made heroes of those who returned, reveling in the news of an ancient powerful culture on Yellow Sky, and even the most pessimistic Orlamu colonists found something to look forward to in the daily news. Had they realized what had begun, they might have kept their mouths shut.

BRING ON THE BELIEVERS

The team brought the artifact back to Mount Illumination, where it continued to function. For three weeks, the artifact healed anything from the smallest abrasions to some serious medical ailments. It delivered the only cure for black fever. Orlamu scientists were at a loss to explain the machine's operation despite the high-tech sensor gear brought along by both the exploration team and Orlamu ships. Meanwhile, a weird sense of fearlessness lived in Mount Illumination. Rough-and-tumble sports, rock climbing, and other dangerous games proliferated. After all, unless you died, the artifact could fix anything, it seemed. Then, quite suddenly, it stopped working altogether after twenty-five days. An Orlamu youth broke a wrist during a

PRELATE TRETAL

Level 14 weren Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 11	(+1)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 10		PER 11	

Durability: 15/15/8/8 Action check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Perk: Good Looks

Attacks

Unarmed 12/6/3 d4+1w/d4+3w/d4+1m LI/O

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [11]; Unarmed [11]—*brawl* [12]; Stamina [10]—*endurance* [12]; Knowledge [12]—*language: Weren* [15], *language: Standard* [15], *Orlamist doctrine* [16]; Life Science [12]; Medical [12]—*medical knowledge* [14], *psychology* [14], *treatment* [15], *surgery* [14], *xenomedicine: human* [18]; Administration [10]; Awareness [10]; Resolve [10]—*physical* [11], *mental* [12]; Teach [10]—*Tech Op* [12]; Culture [11]—*diplomacy* [14], *etiquette: Orlamu* [14]; Interaction [11]—*charm* [14], *interview* [13], *taunt* [12]; Leadership [11]—*inspire* [14].

Four years ago, Tretal served the community of Mount Illumination as a physician answering the medical needs of weren and humans on planet. The child of a convert to the Orlamist faith, Tretal was also a respected leader of the community, active in church and the schools on Yellow Sky. As a matter of course, she studied Orlamism and the Divine Unconscious. Still, her membership in the Church was generally seen as simply another way to assist the community. She also remained one of the most sought-after unattached weren on planet, thanks to her attractiveness and her success.

The previous religious leader, Prelate Monira, surprised the colony by selecting Tretal as his successor, the first weren so honored to lead Yellow Sky and only one of a few dozen given the title Prelate. In the last year, Tretal has proven worthy of her black-sleeved robe. By public opinion and that of the religious hierarchy of Prophethome, the prelate has handled the transition from independent settlement to a protectorate of the Orlamu Theocracy smoothly. While keeping the needs of her people first, she's managed to appease the Prophets back in Old Space. Of course, it would be difficult to replace or remove Tretal in any event; even among the Orlamu, weren leaders are a precious minority, and she is very popular on Yellow Sky.

rough field hockey match, and for the first time in days, one of the colony's physicians saw work.

Word of the Stoneburners and their miraculous artifact raced outward. News of the wonder cure extended to systems of the Verge and beyond; it didn't matter that back on Yellow Sky, the device had ceased functioning. Over the next few months, visitors interested in the archaeological sites came to Tychus—first a trickle of those close by, then a flood as the news reached a level that had everyone in the Verge talking. They came for a variety of reasons. Some sought release from a long-lasting ailment. Some hoped to venture into the lowlands and repeat the first expedition's success. Of course, many of these had no intention of returning any of their discoveries to Mount Illumination—unless they could sell them there at a good price. The largest contingent to arrive on Yellow Sky were of a religious mindset. All manner of believers, from Old Earth Christians, Ancientists, Orlamists, and Hatre Brethren to less famous others, came to study, to pray, or to seek illumination, drawn by the mystery of the long-lost colony, coupled with word of an ancient culture and a marvelous object of magic.

Since 2500, Yellow Sky has become the center of more religious activity than any point within hundreds of light-years—perhaps anywhere outside of Old Space. But there's no unity of belief here, no foundation for a new religion, only several hundred priests, missionaries, and scholars of theology on a bizarre and competitive quest.

All in all, some five thousand "nonresidents" currently live on Yellow Sky. By 2501, the number of arriving ships had fallen quite low; a dozen or so limp in each month. Fortunately, Mount Illumination has the capacity to hold this many visitors. But they have begun to strain the colony's resources.

GOVERNMENT

The Orlamist Temple serves the two functions of government and spiritual guidance. Even those citizens that don't declare an Orlamist faith are governed by Orlamist religious leaders—or at least the bureaucrats that run the daily government operations. Such government perplexes many non-Orlamu, who despite years of dealing with Orlamu, find the prospect of religious rule anachronistic.

Although the system has the potential for numerous abuses, the Theocracy espouses a near-universal equality of sentients, and has established freedom of religious belief as one of its underlying tenets. Those of other religious faiths are welcome to practice their chosen faith, as long as it brings no harm to others or denigrates their beliefs. It's no different on Yellow Sky. The colonists have kept an open-door policy concerning religious foundations coming to Yellow Sky. The Orlamists share all information that they discover concerning the Stoneburners of the lowlands. And though they request that expeditions led by other religions do the same, they do nothing to enforce disclosure.

As a result, the Orlamist government led by Prelate Tretal enjoys a spectacular popularity among both colonists and visitors. To handle daily matters, Orlamist ministers visit with many families of the colony, often spending the night. They stay in touch this way and keep the faith among the flock. Tretal also forms numerous ad hoc committees that often take on a life of their own. The committees have only as much power to enforce their recommendations as Tretal grants them, but their publicly-expressed views are difficult to ignore. Eight committees have a permanent status now, made up of Orlamists, secular colonists, and even believers of other faiths. The Committee of Stoneburner Study is the most well known, but the other committees, such as the Agricultural, Housing, and Mining Committees have more impact on the daily lives of the colonists.

STELLAR RELATIONS

Of the thirteen stellar nations and dozens of Verge governments, only the Orlamu Theocracy has paid the Tychus system much attention. Even the Galactic Concord has left the system in Orlamu hands. Only a single Administrator, Marguerite Muwanga (Hf/Concord/DCS-4), resides in Mount Illumination, in the event that a visitor to the planet has problems dealing with the local Orlamu government. Muwanga has had little to do, and she spends most of her days composing letters and requests to be transferred to another system. Meanwhile, she compiles all the data made public about the Stoneburners for relay to Concord authorities.

The Orlamu Theocracy has cordial relations with its young colony, but seems at a loss concerning how to deal with it. Months pass between communiques. So the Theocracy leaves the colony to its own devices for the most part. Other than mid-rank Orlamist priests, no senior Orlamist has come to Yellow Sky from Old Space. No prelate has done more than visit briefly. This pleases many in the colony but irritates those who realize that if the Theocracy paid more attention, conditions on Yellow Sky would improve all the quicker.

ECONOMY

Yellow Sky's economy resembles best what was once called "cottage industry." Ruled by outdated science and powered by the hands of thousands of independent family farms, the Yellow Sky economy has little to no impact on that of nearby Verge systems, much less the human-explored galaxy as a whole. Still, the people of Yellow Sky do represent a good market for the small- to mid-sized trader to sell merchandise, although not to the colonists' satisfaction.

With their backward technology, just about any instrument, device, or machine produced in the last two hundred years can find use in Mount Illumination or in the fields. As many Verge systems rid themselves of technology a hundred or

more years old now that the stellar nations have returned, Yellow Sky has become a dumping ground for worthless technology that might otherwise litter junkyards or be targeted for chemical decomposition. The colonists realize their unfavorable position, but they can do little about it.

IRON MINING

Iron doesn't have the exchange value of precious metals or rhodium, but its abundance in the upper crust led to the construction of numerous mining camps. They sprang up during the Long Silence, the ore refined and used to construct steel tools and instruments for farming. They multiplied in number in the middle years as the crew of the *Jacland* demanded iron ore in exchange for manufactured goods of Alaundril, Bluefall, and Lison.

Since those days, iron mining continues in more than forty crude strip mines on Yellow Sky. Some of the oldest, located on the same mountainous ridge as Mount Illumination, have been abandoned. The rest keep active, producing tons upon tons of ore, most of it for traders coming to the planet.

The largest of the iron mines today is the Prince Albert Mine, located about 800 kilometers southeast of Mount Illumination. After eight years of operation, excavation of Prince Albert's ore continues unabated. Unfortunately, most of the plateau around which Prince Albert rests has become torn up and lifeless, and harmful chemicals have soaked into the water that flows from the hill's slope; even deep below in the lowlands, the area around the stream suffers.

TOURS

Whether serving ambitious adventurers or mere travelers seeking a more exotic locale, the Tourist Bureau of Yellow Sky offers hospitality second to none. It helps first-time visitors arrange for hotel stays or accommodation in one of the many hospices. Free of charge, the bureau provides a guide for the newcomer's first day. The guide can bring the tourist up to date on current events of Tychus. More importantly, the Bureau can point out any of the local dangers not covered in brochures or data crystals, thus minimizing the likelihood of injury.

The typical guide is a nonprofessional; Gamemasters can use the Marginal supporting cast template for laborer or spacehand from Chapter 6: The Supporting Cast in the *Gamemaster Guide*. The volunteer guides don't have access to any special information or secret events; they're typically farmhands or urban laborers who gain a day off from more strenuous activity by volunteering.

After this day of hospitality, the Tourist Bureau can recommend any of four different agencies on Yellow Sky that can supervise a stay with planned activities. They can also forward the traveler along to one of the religious faiths that he or she may have an interest in.

PHILEMON SOBU OWNER & MANAGER, SOBU TOURS

Level 12 human Free Agent

STR 10	(0)	INT 8	(0)
DEX 11	(+1)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 12		PER 11	

Durability: 12/12/6/6 Action check: 10+/9/4/2

Move: sprint 60, run 40, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Marginal/1 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed	12/6/3	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
11mm ch pistol	12/6/3	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	HI/O
11mm ch rifle	12/6/3	d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m	HI/O

Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [10]; Unarmed [10]-*brawl* [12]; Modern [11]-*pistol* [12], *rifle* [12]; Vehicle Operation [11]; Movement [12]-*trailblazing* [16]; Stamina [12]-*endurance* [14]; Survival [12]-*Yellow Sky lowlands survival* [16]; Business [8]-*small business* [9]; Knowledge [8]-*computer* [9], *language: Standard* [11]; Navigation [8]-*surface* [12]; Awareness [9]-*intuition* [12], *perception* [12]; Investigate [9]-*search* [12], *track* [12]; Interaction [11]-*bargain* [12], *charm* [12].

Tried as they might, the colonists of Yellow Sky could never make Philemon Sobu feel truly comfortable among them. This despite the happy family that bore and raised him in the friendly neighborhood of Mount Illumination that he called home. A misfit from the start, Sobu took to long wandering trips during his teenage years. These pedestrian excursions made him one of the foremost experts on the lowlands when 2497 rolled around.

Sobu considered leaving, but quickly found that his knowledge and the things he had learned of the lowlands could be put to good use. With all the interest in the Stoneburner sites, it seemed a natural step to begin leasing his knowledge to interested parties. After all, they had far too much money to spend if they could afford to jet across the galaxy to come to this lonely corner.

Most of Sobu's trips down now follow a predictable path—to the remains of a Stoneburner site that truly does lie in ruins. It has never shown any activity, and that's fine with him. He has even considered rigging the site with lights and gear to make it look more important. It's not that he's not interested in more honest exploration, but the average tourist doesn't know any better, and they still pay.

SOBU TOURS

Sobu Tours isn't included among the four fine choices that the Tourist Bureau advertises to newcomers. Indeed, Sobu Tours doesn't really advertise at all. Mr. Philemon Sobu doesn't find any need for such waste; those who know that his services exist can find him when they want him. And in the last five years, found him they have.

Philemon Sobu, the sole owner and employee of Sobu Tours, is the only Orlamu on Yellow Sky that dares to make regular trips with tourists down into the lowlands on foot. At best, the other tours will fly quickly through some foggy green soup before prudently rising up again. Sobu goes all the way down, and public reputation holds that he has even been paid to escort travelers into the ruins of dangerous Stoneburner sites. Of course, Sobu doesn't come cheap, demanding an average of \$5,000 per day—plus additional expenses as he warrants for the expedition. Plus, he won't leave without waivers of liability for injury or death, signed and witnessed.

YELLOW SKY

"A world split by the hand of God. It's possible, should our mission produce no better prospects, that Yellow Sky may be suitable for colonial development. It should be possible to survive in the upper altitudes without too much hardship. That doesn't mean I know anyone who'd want to live here. I pity the bastards that will someday live on these rocky isles in the sky, unable to see, much less visit, much of their own world."

—Victor Khosti, Captain, OSS Cizre (2336)

It's difficult to describe this planet without first determining the altitude one wishes to comment upon. In the highlands, a biosphere not completely alien to humanity's struggles to survive. The high altitude also helps to cool off the planet's oppressive heat. In the lowlands, the new focus for today's explorers, nonnatives wither and die, choked by poisonous chlorine and burned by temperatures in excess of 50° C.

Contrary to Captain Khosti's pessimism, many perfectly sane people have made the choice to emigrate to Yellow Sky, and thanks to recent developments more arrive all the time. The people on Yellow Sky experience few difficulties with their environment as long as they remain in the uplands. That said, Yellow Sky, for all the interest it attracts in popular media, is a tiny colony. Its population could disappear into a single district of the larger cities of the Verge. As a result, matters on Yellow Sky are more fluid, less fixed, and often more dangerous than they are on more civilized worlds. Not only does the planet lack many modern amenities and comforts, but its people must be largely responsible for their own destinies, see to their own protection, and make their own livelihoods.

BLACK FEVER: VIRUS, NO VACCINE

Few lifeforms bridge the gap between the planet's two biospheres, but the black fever is one of them. With more than 4,000 human and 300 weren lives already claimed, the fever gains distinction as the most deadly virus in the Verge. It is not just because of its mortality rate, but also because of the speed with which the virus acts. Five or six hours after being introduced to the virus, the typical victim falls into a state of extreme physical duress; bruises and welts appear on the skin, and lethargy overwhelms the victim. Death occurs within two days. Luckier ones—fewer than a quarter of those infected—manage to fight off the virus, usually returning to health in an equally short time. In either event, those suffering the disease become additional vectors for infection.

Black fever preys on any Series I or Series III lifeform it can find. Nearly every species of the Stellar Ring, sentient or not, is susceptible to the fever. The livestock raised by Yellow Sky's colonists have a death rate similar to that of humans. All in all, some ten to twenty cases occur in Mount Illumination each week.

Game information on the black fever appears in the Tychus System chapter in the *Alien Compendium*.

COUNTERING THE PLAGUE

The colonists have put great effort into finding a cure for black fever, but to date, it has eluded them. Even the modern medical techniques brought by Orlamu physicians have been insufficient to the task. The only bright spot so far has been the discovery by colonial doctors of a treatment that has at least some chance of combating the fever: coagulants. Even the application of these agents has only limited effect. But for a disease that kills as mercilessly as does black fever, even the 50% drop in mortality rate brought about by the coagulant treatments is a big improvement.

The best measure to take, generally speaking, is to avoid infection. Unfortunately, that's easier said than done. Sampling of the air around Mount Illumination reveals concentrations of the virus' DNA, and it's found in even the deepest valleys. About the only advice virologists can offer is to avoid hard physical exertion; the virus seems to thrive in an organism that's active. That's not easy to accept for the farmers who must work their fields, or for parents who watch their children run about and play, heedless of the risk they may be taking.

HIGHLANDS

The highlands of Yellow Sky were created eons ago as a result of severe meteoric impacts. Much of the rest of Yellow Sky is cloaked in a thick chlorine atmosphere, but the highlands rise above these toxic areas.

Mount Illumination and other settlements have been built at an average altitude of 5,000 meters. On many

worlds, the air at such a height would be impossible to breathe; here, however, the thick planetary atmosphere becomes comfortable. The chlorine gas present in the atmosphere is heavier than oxygen or nitrogen, and thus most gathers in the valleys below. Thus, the air in the highlands is breathable—though many visitors notice a trace of chlorine in the air. It takes some getting used to, and many complain of nausea, irritated eyes, and similar symptoms. All human settlements keep a supply of purified air around just in case, and any traveler that's going from place to place often dons at least a filter mask.

The highlands are also cooler. With the planetary average temperature in the high forties, temperatures on the equatorial valleys can reach above 60° C—well beyond human tolerance. Colonists have lost their lives in haphazard attempts to venture out without adequate protection. In the temperate highlands where civilization centers itself, the days are comfortable, and nights rather chilly. Average highs reach around 35° C, with lows sinking down to 10° C or so.

The final challenge in the highlands is radiation. Human buildings are shielded against the radiation, but this invisible threat can't be removed. Two sources account for the high energy particles. The first is heavy radioactive metals present in the crust. The second is Tychus itself; both the magnetic field and the atmosphere of the planet do little to absorb the star's harmful energies. Heroes on Yellow Sky must make weekly Constitution feat checks to avoid radiation sickness (see Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action in the *Gamemaster Guide*).

FLORA & FAUNA

What with the interest that the ruins of a long-dead civilization engenders, the native species of the planet receive almost none of the attention they deserve. More than a billion years of evolution have produced a biosphere that's diverse and well populated. Although it does not have the variety of life found once on Earth, or present on other garden worlds, Yellow Sky's biosphere is interesting in that two different types of life coexist side by side.

The highlands are home to Series I life. Regrettably, this zone has not been the real beneficiary of evolutionary progress. Perhaps the explanation lies in that the highlands occupy less than 5% of the planet's land over sea level. Plant life covers the highlands, with numerous species ranging from the smallest grasses to trees that stretch up to a dozen meters in height. The slightly higher gravity has discouraged the growth of true giants in the highlands.

Amongst the highlands' fauna, bacteria and primitive life (including the black fever virus) are the most common forms. Most of these parasites restrict themselves to preying on other native life, and other than the black fever virus, have no effect on humanity or other life that has been transplanted from other worlds. Reptilian scavengers, none of them much bigger than 10 cm in size, live in the

highlands as well, apparently more comfortable there than in the torrid lowlands. Finally, bird life of all kinds, some of Series I, some of Series III, bridges the gap between Yellow Sky's two regions. All native life on the planet demonstrates a tolerance for chlorine gas and for the planet's increased radiation.

In the lowlands, Series III life abounds. Much of this is uncataloged, as the settlers on Yellow Sky had little time to venture into the valleys. Recently, however, there has developed an increased interest in studying the creatures who live in the lowlands. Although the great majority of the expeditions into the lowlands are concerned with Stoneburner ruins, recently an Orlamu science team explored the valleys below one of the distant peaks, bringing out several live creatures. These they tagged and released back into the wild. Orlamu xenologist Dr. Emma Martin hopes to learn something of their migratory patterns.

Other than the everpresent blue vegetation, humans on Yellow Sky are more likely to gaze upon familiar, Terran-stock animals on the planet. The Orlamu colonists carried a small menagerie of livestock with them when they came, each of them genetically altered prior to arrival to withstand small amounts of chlorine and radiation. Ironically, the only thing that the Orlamu brought that wasn't designed to survive naturally on Yellow Sky was themselves.

WEATHERING

In the last year, a team of geologists visiting Yellow Sky alerted its colonists to a growing concern: Weathering. The highlands themselves have been worn down by time, wind, and water. Everyone knows that over time, the highlands shall fall lower and lower, making habitation more and more difficult. It's an inevitable geological fact.

But it wasn't until the Theocracy-sponsored fellowship turned over its results in October of 2501 that the colonists learned just how pressing the threat might be. Human activity on the highlands has exacerbated the problem with construction, excavation, and stripmining of iron. Fortunately the plateau on which Mount Illumination rests isn't one of those showing evidence of instability, but many others aren't so lucky.

Powerless against this threat, the Orlamu have forbidden additional iron mining within 1000 kilometers of settlements or farms. They also plan to enforce tough codes on construction projects to limit additional erosion.

MOUNT ILLUMINATION

The Orlamu chose a majestic rise on which to build. Mount Illumination, now home to just over five thousand people, rests some 6000 meters above sea level. Further, it lies less than a kilometer from a cleft in the highlands.



After walking due east, the colonists can gaze down the cliff into the haze of green. With a relatively small population, Mount Illumination proper takes up only about 100 square kilometers. Most colonists acknowledge the city limits to be where farming begins, outside a rectangle 8 kilometers wide and 12 kilometers long. The Orlamists elected to follow a township model, spreading out rather than building up. Most of the buildings are one story in height.

Legally, though, there's little difference between the rural inhabitants and the people of Mount Illumination. The mayor of the city, Prelate Tretal, is the chief executive of Yellow Sky, and she draws no distinction between any person in her stewardship.

Although it doesn't look it, Mount Illumination is a city of steel. Even the smallest residences, occupying only a couple of dozen square meters, surround themselves with walls of metal. Only a thin sheet of ceramic material coats the metal, but this sheet often displays complex decoration. Although this choice of material design makes ventilation and air conditioning more difficult during summer months, it has alleviated some concerns about the mild concentrations of chlorine in the highlands of Yellow Sky.

Architecture itself tends toward the simple and functional. With the exception of the Orlamist Temple, buildings waste no space; shortages of resources and personnel during the Long Silence prevented extravagances. Instead, the colonists reserved their artistry for frescoes and murals. The outer appearance of a building's painted ceramic walls tells much about its inhabitants. The economically disadvantaged of the city are surrounded by walls of plain red, the color of Yellow Sky's muddy clay. More affluent homes are bleached; these often display painted murals or frescoes. Government buildings, Orlamu businesses, and wealthier colonists have colored their buildings in rich spectra reminiscent of the displays of light seen only when a ship enters or leaves drivespace.

THE ORLAMIST TEMPLE

Near the center of Mount Illumination's first dozen buildings, the Orlamist Temple rises up some 33 meters in height, making it easily the tallest building in the colony. It stands out well against the numerous single-story buildings that surround it. And unlike many of the buildings painted for the glory of the Divine Unconscious, the Temple itself wraps itself in a cloak of traditional black.

The Temple, a tower 121 meters on a side at its base, narrows to a mere 11 meters wide at its highest level. A total of eight stories compose the Temple. The lowest level contains the wide congregation hall that's used for both daily religious services and open colonial meetings. Unlike most churches, however, the padded pews and open chairs on the chapel floor are quite comfortable, encouraging visitors to stay a while and absorb theosophy or discuss their

opinion. Of the two, the Orlamist gatherings are better attended than the colonial council meetings.

Above the chapel, the business of coordinating the colonial government and leading the Orlamist flock into enlightenment occupies about a hundred offices, study and meditation chambers, and conference rooms. At the highest level are the private chambers of Prelate Tretal, the leader of the colony and the Orlamist faith on Yellow Sky.

THE DIRE UNCONSCIOUS

Generally speaking, the Orlamist faith embraces a diversity of belief surrounding the Divine Unconscious, or what nonbelievers call drivespace. Just what form of illumination the Divine Unconscious can offer humanity, and what course it hopes to lead humanity down, are the subjects of great debate on Prophethome. So while the Orlamists have the best scientific theories on drivespace, they can't answer many of the questions posed by their own beliefs.

United by only an informal dogma, the Orlamists who recontacted their lost kin in the Tychus system found something surprising. Most of the Orlamists on Yellow Sky had adopted a belief in the "Dire Unconscious." A place of being like its more beatific twin, the Dire Unconscious is the creator and sponsor of things dark and evil. The belief in the Dire Unconscious reaches the highest levels of the Orlamist Temple, including Prelate Tretal.

This belief arose during a debate in the Temple in 2389, after a foray into the lowlands surrounding Mount Illumination to seek a route to a nearby plateau. During the excursion, the exploration party encountered a terrifying remnant of the ancient civilization that once lived on Yellow Sky. The expedition accidentally released a dimensional horror; the slaughter was awful. Only two members of the expedition managed to get away and return to Mount Illumination, only to discover they had led the creature back to their community. Many colonists died before the creature was destroyed, and many more driven into madness from the shock of encountering such a creature. After this debacle, when the people of the town gathered to mourn their losses, they began to question just how the Divine Unconscious could countenance such an abomination. As the discussion progressed over the months and years that followed, a consensus of opinion began to develop that held that there must be a Consciousness that opposed the Divine, that had its origins not in the evil of humanity but in that of another intelligence. Another place holds this intelligence, one that has access to our universe through portals. Whether these portals exist in defined places in our universe or are created by the creatures of the Dire Unconscious at their will is an issue of some debate even today.

Never before has anything like Manichaeism risen within Orlamism. And it's something that the First Prophet would like to rid himself of, if he could. More than a dozen proselytizing Orlamists have come to Yellow Sky from Old Space, hoping to educate and restore the

YELLOW SKY POPULATION

28,255 SENTIENTS

Human 95%

Orion	1%	Austrin	1%
Thuldan	2%	Nariac	0%
Orlamu	81%	Insight	0%
Rigunmor	1%	Hatire	4%
Solar	3%	Borealin	3%
VoidCorp	0%	StarMech	0%
Independent	3%	Concord	1%

Alien 5%

Sesheyar	0%	T'sa	2%
Mechalus	2%	Weren	94%
Fraal	2%	Other	0%

The most recent census, taken in January of 2502, emerged from a directive of the First Prophet to study the colonial status of Yellow Sky before making a final determination of its relationship with the greater Theocracy.

Despite the claims of some explorers and religious organizations, the existence of sentient beings in the lowlands of Yellow Sky has yet to be confirmed, and no lowland lifeforms were included in the Orlamu census.

colonists to the more mainstream faith. They haven't enjoyed more success; indeed, surrounded by this foreign belief, some of the Prophet's servants have expressed an open mind on the question. Of course, the newcomer religions to Yellow Sky see the division as an opportunity.

This belief has consequences today. Although the inhabitants of Yellow Sky welcome the trade and technology brought by the Arrivers and others, many of the more conservative among them are not at all supportive of the exploration of the ancient sites of the lowlands. Although none of the people who actually witnessed the devastation wrought by the dimensional horror are still alive, enough of them remember the stories haltingly told them by their grandparents, and they remember the vacant stares of other elders whose minds had never recovered from the terror and loss they experienced.

CHURCH OF THE CHILDREN

One of the fastest-growing faiths on Yellow Sky is the Ancientist religion. Their presence on the planet could easily be expected thanks to their interest in all Precursor sites and artifacts. The great majority of the Children on Yellow Sky are Arrivers and first-generation colonists. Here, so close to bizarre alien technologies and the threat of dimensional horrors, the Ancientist faith draws little support from the descendants of those who lived here through the Long Silence.

Most of the Children on the planet follow a belief in Precursor Resurrection. Someday soon the Precursors, the Children claim, shall make their presence known to the galaxy and usher in a new Golden Age. The dissent that fragments the believers on Yellow Sky involves how best to prepare for that day. Some say that the defenses on the Precursor installations indicate that disturbing the ruins offends the great old ones. This splinter group, led by Emilie Lenoir (Hf/Borealin/DFA-5) argues for the termination of all expeditions to the lowlands, the return of all Stoneburner artifacts, and a humble begging for forgiveness of humanity's transgressions by all the people of Yellow Sky. Whether tempted by the discoveries or honestly skeptical, few others even inside the Ancientist church give this much credence, so this splinter group resorts to praying to the Precursors.

The majority of the Children follow a path more common to the church. The Ancientists, a young church, don't have the resources available to bankroll and protect their own descents, so they join in other expeditions to the lowlands, often with independents or even other religious groups.

THE CHURCH OF THE COSIMIR

Upon coming to Yellow Sky in 2497, Brother Magnus Kalman (Hm/Thuldan/FA-3) wasted no time rendering his judgment on the Stoneburners and their ilk. Claiming to be visited by the spirit of the Cosimir, he proclaimed: "The Stoneburners are abominations before the Cosimir." It may have helped that Kalman nearly died during a trip to the lowlands after an encounter with a dimensional horror . . . or with something he found in the Stoneburner ruins he visited and refuses to discuss. Since then, Kalman wasted no time in issuing directives to dispatch Mind Knights, a militant wing of Hatire Mindwalkers, to Yellow Sky.

These ten crusaders, along with dozens of others armed with more conventional weapons, offer the most unusual of tactics concerning the Stoneburners. They do not work with other groups or expeditions, although they have been known to study the data from the lowlands in order to better know the enemy. Instead, their expeditions to a Stoneburner site focus on the singular goal of destruction: A holy purification, administered by cleansing fire and fiery explosives. In the last year, two Stoneburner sites have been destroyed—at the cost of thirty lives.

What the rest of the colony doesn't know is that the Brethren crusaders are under strict orders to recover Stoneburner artifacts, relics, and information prior to beginning their ritualistic razing. Kalman collects the objects with the hope of finding a way to more completely remove the Stoneburners.

Prelate Tretal has done little to restrain the Brethren from their activities, despite a legal right to do so and the outcry among many scholars to preserve what the

122
TYCHUS

Brethren take license to destroy. It may have something to do with her own belief in a Dire Unconscious, or perhaps she doesn't want to discard a weapon that she may need someday.

CATHEDRAL OF ST. IGNATIUS

The Catholic Church and its saints trace their history to a time that seems as distant as the civilization of the Stoneburners, and the scholars who have come to Yellow Sky hope to continue their search for God in the hearts and minds of beings throughout the galaxy. They've come from as far as Old Earth to find records of the Stoneburner culture. The Cathedral of St. Ignatius is the only faith to base itself outside of Mount Illumination, on a highland rise bereft of all but a few farmers.

Although better funded than any group other than the Orlamists themselves, the priests of St. Ignatius do most of the work in the relative safety of the cathedral and abbey they've built. Some two hundred servants of God, only a quarter of them scholars, live in the cathedral and off the three farms around it.

Superior General Zachary Ross (Hm/Solar/DFA-10) leads the Society of Jesus on Yellow Sky. Many of his flock care little for the goings-on in the lowlands and have come to the distant corner to follow his leadership or to seek a quiet sanctuary. They have that here. The cathedral follows a model little changed since the Middle Ages, and in this the low technology of the colony seems to suit the Christians.

HOSTELS AND HOSPICES

Thanks to the same explosion of visitors, Mount Illumination has quickly expanded to the west in the last two years. Dozens of new homes have been built, along with a cluster of hostels and hospices on the city's edge. The hostels, maintained by private citizens, have become home to many of the scientists, academics, or other independents coming to Yellow Sky. While they charge an average of \$200 per week, most of the hostels provide indigents—or students visiting from universities—accommodations in exchange for a few hours of volunteer labor each day.

The hospices have a longer history, originally used by colonists themselves in their younger days, before they had decided upon a permanent residence on Yellow Sky. About 50% of the weren population on Yellow Sky made the hospices their permanent homes, thus forging a community of their own.

Today, the Orlamist hospices remain the largest (but far from the only) ones in Mount Illumination. Every religious order that wants to attract missionaries, donations, or the attention of locals and offworld superiors has built residences of their own. They do their best to keep them filled, often offering housing free of charge to visitors or new emigres to Yellow Sky. Of course, they may ask for a donation to help support their cause. More likely, they'll invite

their guests to all sorts of ceremonies: masses, classes, and fundraisers. Always ready to offer wisdom or just human company, the Orlamists take it in stride if one of their guests rejects Orlamism.

SPACEPORT

On the northeastern edge of Mount Illumination, in a district that has seen the least development because of zoning and safety regulations, a type 4 spaceport welcomes off-worlders to Yellow Sky. Other than a few trade ships that load their cargo directly from mining sites, any traffic that comes through Tychus and bothers to stop in at its populated planet pays a visit to the spaceport.

There's nothing that makes the spaceport unique, although it is the one urban burden that the Theocracy proper decided to remove from the colony's hands. After years of little to no use, by 2497 the spaceport had fallen into great disrepair; it could provide no other services than refueling (usually). With the refit operation on the Illumination spaceport, the Orlamu have encouraged the kind of trade and infusion of new blood that the colonists desperately need.

OTHER SETTLEMENTS

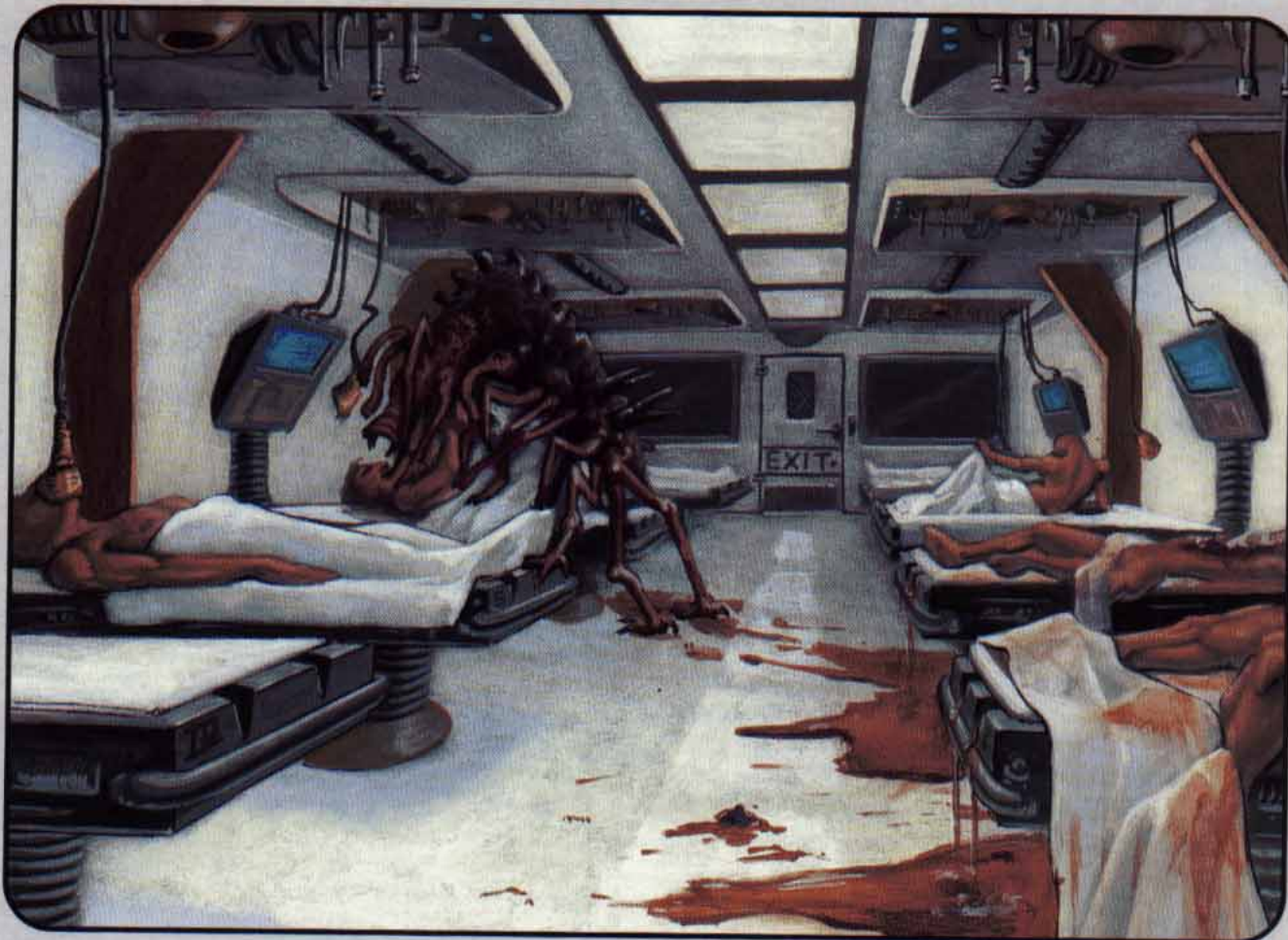
Mount Illumination stands out as the only true urban center on the planet, but thousands live on small independent farms. Most of these farms produce little more than they need to survive. Only a few have any kind of corporate nature; most consist of anywhere from one to five families living and working to till the alien soil.

The rural people of the planet are the ones that suffer most from the technological gap. Many of them don't have radios or even the means to regularly travel to Mount Illumination. Instead, they depend on monthly visits from Orlamists to keep them going and deliver materials that they cannot produce. In exchange, they return a portion of their crops to feed the people of Mount Illumination.

LOWLANDS

The lowlands represent the real Yellow Sky. They're an alien landscape dotted with warm lakes and thick, soundless swamps. They're also teeming with dark life: black plants that prosper with only the scarcest volume of light trickling through the almost impenetrable haze of thick green air above. These plants are best known for supplementing their diet of soil, air, and light energy with more meaty fare. The lowlands demonstrate all that is best about exploring the unknown: challenge, danger, and the possibility of incredible reward. They also offer a painful end for any who are unprepared, unprotected, or unlucky.

The problems begin with the heat. While physics teaches that hot air has a tendency to rise, on Yellow Sky the thick



air keeps most of the warmth close to the ground. At its worst, the temperature reaches an inhospitable 70° C on blazing summer days. Even on average, the daily highs keep the lowlands at a balmy 55° C. Anyone who wanders the lowlands without an e-suit must make *Stamina-endurance* checks once every minute or lose d4 stun points; once these are depleted, the affected individual begins losing wound points, and finally, mortal points. A soft e-suit doesn't fully insulate against the warmth, but it reduces the checks to once per 10 minutes. Only a hard e-suit or an insulated and enclosed vehicle offers complete protection.

At sea level, the air pressure reaches some 9 atmospheres—enough to cause serious problems with human respiratory (and auditory) systems. The pressure alone requires an unprotected human to make a *Stamina-endurance* check once per hour or suffer stun damage as outlined under "Exposure Challenge" in Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action in the *Gamemaster Guide*. Even with a respirator mask, checks must be made daily.

Truly, though, the pressure won't be the thing that kills; the poisonous chlorine causes more problems. The atmospheric chemistry is quite different from nitrogen-oxygen mix; fire does not burn and many reactions may not turn out as expected in the lowland air. Anyone foolish enough to be exposed to the chlorine atmosphere without any breathing

apparatus must succeed at a Constitution feat check (at a +3 step penalty) once per minute or take damage as indicated for a caustic agent (see Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action of the *Gamemaster Guide*). An e-suit of any variety provides total protection.

The last problem is radiation, although it's no worse down below than it is above (see "Highlands" earlier in this chapter).

FLORA & FAUNA

Here, at last, is one world that doesn't look ready to surrender to humanity's tireless advance. The creatures of Yellow Sky, and even many of its plants, refuse to give up their secrets so easily, to fall within the dominion of humanity, to be terraformed or domesticated out of existence.

The hostility begins with the lowest plants of the lowlands' swamps. They're made of sterner stuff than the weaker blue plants in the highlands—chlorinated compounds for the most part—that can provide the protection they need. Of course, the more "normal" vegetation above doesn't supplement its diet with meat like speargrass and other species do.

The lowlands are home to Series III life, with thousands if not millions of species, each fulfilling its own evolutionary niche. The more mundane animals, mostly snakes and

reptiles, have no experience with humanity and no reason to fear their energy rifles or charge weaponry. For sample species, you can use the Crocodile or Constrictor and Venomous Snake animals found in Chapter 17: Creatures & Aliens in the *Gamemaster Guide*; for more exotic specimens, look to the Ophidian, Trilobite, or even the terrible Saurian alien templates found in the same chapter. The *Alien Compendium* describes other species, including the siren, the sole species on Yellow Sky that demonstrates powers of mental telepathy and suggestion, making it a fearsome predator.

At the top of the food chain are the dimensional horrors. But they didn't evolve on Yellow Sky, or any world humanity has yet to discover.

THE SEA

Water isn't especially common on Yellow Sky. Fully half of the planet's water table is locked up in the marshes and swamps. The rest is reserved for several seas, lakes, and rivers. The rivers bring water from the highlands above. On the way down, though, it becomes just as poisoned with chlorine as everything else. Even the water in the highlands needs filtration before it can be used for drinking. On the positive side, the first swimming pools on Yellow Sky, whenever they are built, won't need much in the way of a disinfectant.

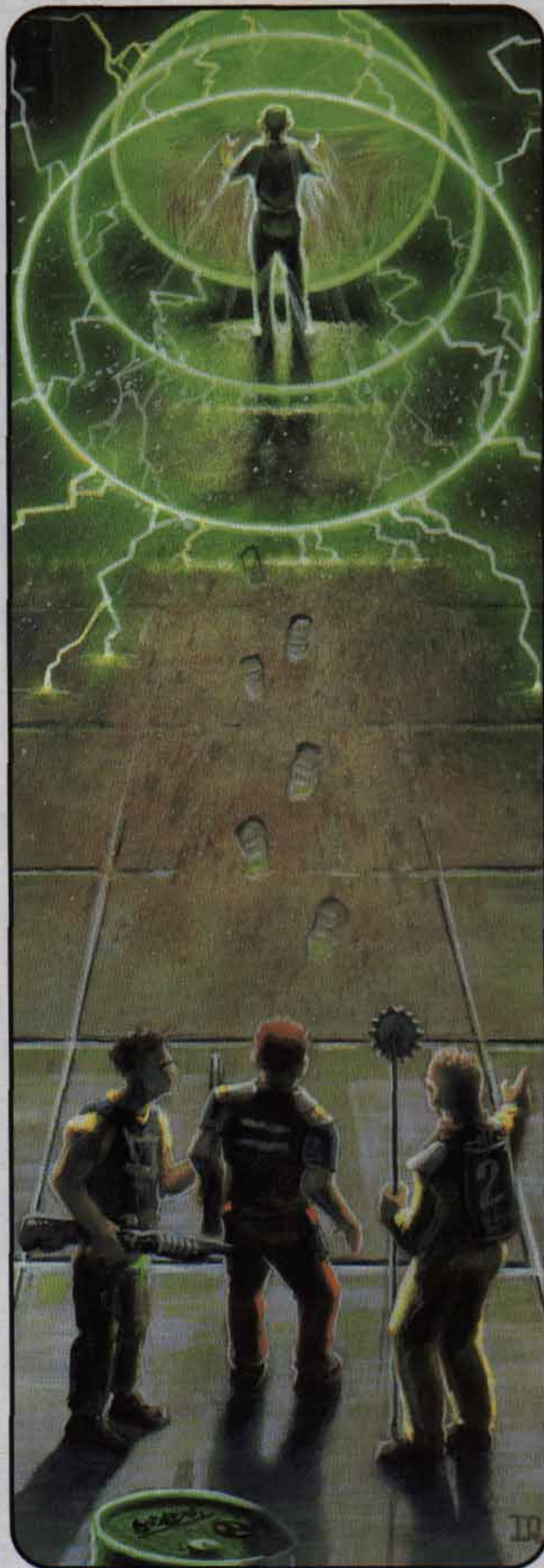
EMPTY SPACE

Tychus is, relatively speaking, a cool star. Because of their cold climes and lack of mineral or biological resources, the twelve other worlds of Yellow Sky have been ignored by sentient life. Not even the ancient Stoneburners appeared to have found the planets interesting; several photographic surveys show no signs that anything was ever built on the other planets.

The sole other place that receives some attention is the Glitter Field, a thin belt of asteroids located in orbit between Yellow Sky and Pale Ton, the third planet. The asteroids, like Yellow Sky, have rich deposits of metal. The Theocracy preserves its claim to the belt as it does to the rest of the system, but does nothing about the occasional prospector poking through the belt looking for mineral riches.

TYCHUS DEFENSES

Should violence ever make its way to Tychus, the Orlamu colonists would find themselves ill-prepared for conflict. The system is generally rated as Type Two (see the *STAR*DRIVE* campaign setting). No naval presence regularly patrols the system, but the population on Yellow Sky is high enough to ensure an amount of traffic that discourages idle criminal acts. On the planet below, the only organized body under arms is a police force numbering fifty officers, half



Stoneburner Site Map



CONFIGURE X

TRANSLATE
AUTOMATIC

FAILURE TO TRANSLATE
LANGUAGE DOES NOT
MATCH DATABASE

CONFIGURE Z

TRANSLATE
CUSTOM SYSTEM

FAILURE TO TRANSLATE
LANGUAGE DOES NOT
CONFORM TO KNOW
STANDARDS

SAMPLE DATASET

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

A Stoneburner Site

Stoneburners are, and should remain, a mystery of your campaign. Giant cephalopods that ruled this planet—and countless others—millions of years ago, the Stoneburners' greatest testimony to their power is that a record, evidence of their culture, has survived.

When involving your heroes in an expedition down to a Stoneburner site, menace should be your watchword. The planet itself should seem to rise up against the intruders as they slog slowly through its marshes, not to mention the surviving agents of the Stoneburners, their dimensional horrors. It is through these demons that humanity has best come to know the Stoneburners, and no one can blame man, woman, or weren for the fear they feel when confronted with such a monstrosity or a recording of its swirling, disemboweling carnage in action.

The following section details some information about Stoneburner sites in general, and one site in specific. You can build an adventure around the site below exactly as presented; with minor changes, it could serve as a template for several expeditions.

LOCATING A SITE

Yellow Sky isn't a small planet, and the conditions don't make surveys of the lowlands easy. Topographical mapping with radar is about the only form of comprehensive maps ever completed, and not very well at that. Heroes could wander for weeks, months even, without ever discovering anything resembling Stoneburner sites.

But that wouldn't make for interesting adventure. So, present the heroes with evidence of a search that was nearly successful but didn't quite reach its ultimate objective. Perhaps a few terrified survivors return to Yellow Sky, loaded with the coordinates of a new site and the desire never to get close to it again. The heroes must then descend—preferably in one of Mount Illumination's few skycars rather than on foot. But eventually they must disembark from their transport and risk their lives to find things. Outside the site feel free to throw in some unpleasant chance encounters with unfriendly native species of flora or fauna, threaten disaster with exposure to elements, or toss in a competing team of explorers.

INSIDE THE SITE

The map on the facing page shows a schematic of what the colonists will come to call "Site 17." All of the buildings in the site are enclosed constructions of black rock. That the buildings are fully enclosed is something rare even in the Stoneburner sites so far discovered.

The descriptions below present the bare bones of what a Stoneburner site may contain; feel free to add your own details and possibilities.

⊖ A pair of outlying, 30-meter-tall towers rise over the western and eastern edges of the site and present the first line of defense against intrusion. Each tower sports two automated turrets that blaze down a rain of plasma fire (energy damage, Good firepower) with a range of 20/50/100 meters. They fire at any living thing that enters range, as a few dead animal skeletons attest. The turrets can keep up their fire indefinitely, firing each phase with an effective skill score of 16 and causing damage of 2d4w/3d4w/4d4w with each successful hit. Standard ranged combat modifiers apply.

The 4-meter tall turrets themselves have Good toughness and a durability of 8 (see "Property Damage" in the *Gamemaster Guide*). They're also protected by an energy shield that offers an armor rating of d6+1 against all forms of attack. Actually destroying the turrets is a nearly impossible task without Amazing firepower weaponry, but it should be possible to knock out the guns with concentrated firepower. It's certainly possible to use other Stoneburner buildings as cover, especially through a northern or southern approach. The guns will remain active until destroyed.

The towers are otherwise pretty empty. The turrets draw energy from a battery-like source that doesn't appear to have any limit to its use.

⊙ The central tower serves much the same function as the ones further out, although its two turrets have a range of only 10/20/50 meters. A controlling mechanism here will allow the remote deactivation of all six turrets, but if it's destroyed, the turrets can be deactivated only by their own destruction.

⊙ The design of this 15-meter-tall building reveals its likely purpose. It's divided into eighty small individual rooms, so it likely served the purpose of housing the Stoneburners. Since no signs of restraints can be found, it's unlikely to have been a jail. Still, it does reveal that the Stoneburners cared somewhat for their privacy and had some sense of individualism.

△ At the center of this building, surrounded by small rooms, is a circular chamber. Even now, the walls of the chamber portray the impact of hundreds of powerful energy blasts. Maybe the room served as a targeting range, or a place of ritual combat, or an execution chamber.

⌘ This large building presents a very austere structure. Only a single hallway winds itself around inside to reach the building's center, where two cages of rock lie. The first is broken and empty. The rock of the second cage ripples oddly against the appearance of light in the chamber, the first light to strike the stone for untold years. This cage contains a dimensional horror (see the *Alien Compendium*). Assume that just about any interference with the cage releases the horror.

After leaving this building, the heroes meet a second dimensional horror that now patrols this site. This should be a fierce battle; the dimensional horror, with Good toughness and formidable armor, is more than a match for many heroes, especially as they must concern themselves with their suits being punctured.

⊞ This building has numerous writings on the wall that seem to be some sort of control panels, although for what is unclear.

The Stoneburners used this building as a communications center to connect with their cities on Yellow Sky and beyond. No recognizable antennae rise above this building's roof, so this will not be immediately clear to the heroes. The communications system is offline.

① A single corridor bisects this building. The interior of the section lies in long shelflike platforms stacked four high. Above each shelf, now-uncharged chemical lighting systems once beamed photons down on the platforms now covered in a dry soil that's heavy with alkalites.

⊞ This building consists of a single central chamber, which is divided by a slab of black rock 0.8 meters tall. Dispersed at regular intervals along the sides of the chamber are shallow shelves empty of any content.

△ From its entrance in the southwest from the section described above to its northeast corner, a steady 33° incline forms the 30-meter long floor. On a plateau at the farthest end, some 6 meters wide, is a flat monument of black stone 1.4 meters tall. On the top of this altar, a wide (1.4 m) circlet of red metal lies, glowing with power. This is an artifact of the Stoneburners.

Refer to the rules in Chapter 12: Alien Artifacts in the *Gamemaster Guide*. The artifact has the Amazing power of Star Transceiver, enabling instantaneous psionic communication within 500 ly. The device has an extreme variant of the Mental Instability drawback, requiring Resolve-*mental resolve* skill checks (with a +3 step penalty) of all nonpsionic sentients in a radius of 25 meters anytime the device is used (see the effects listed in the *Gamemaster Guide*).

After only 4 hours of use (continuous or otherwise), the device becomes nonfunctional until returned to this altar for a day; the heroes shouldn't learn of this energy limit until confronted by it, and they may never realize a way to reenergize the device. (Yes, if the healing artifact of Mount Illumination were returned to its site, it too could be restored.) Make each trip to repower a Stoneburner artifact almost as deadly as the first; bring in new dimensional horrors or dangers as necessary.

⊞ With 10-meter-wide doors opening to the east and a generous open area inside, this chamber likely served as a hangar or garage of some sort. No tracks or remnants of any vehicle are visible.

⊞ Only reached through a series of connecting chambers, once upon a time this chamber performed a role most equivalent to a human library database.

Rows of holographic projectors and monitors hint that this was once a center of activity. Now, the consoles serve no purpose. The energy that was necessary to power the data storage has been lost, and with it whatever information was stored.

A thorough search will reveal a real prize of the site. A venerable optical storage device has graphical data that can be interpreted with a few Computer Science and Physical Science-astronomy skill checks. It shows an ancient map of the Verge, complete with stars and planets. Many familiar stars in are in different positions or are altogether missing, and each object appears to have its own name. Finally, a study (using Tactics-space tactics) of a series of additional lines and markings reveals them to be likely lines of territory and battle. Other lines may represent fleet movements. By all appearances, the Stoneburners were fighting an interstellar war in this region.

⊞ A collection of holographic displays, once again nonfunctional, line the chamber. It's unclear whether the room was intended to act as a security and monitoring station, some form of entertainment bay, or a communications room.

⌘ See the illustration of the spatial rift earlier in this chapter. The room's center appears as just such, once the proper combination of controls and ingenuity of the input devices is made. (Use a complex skill check with either a Knowledge-xenoarchaeology or a Technical Science specialty skill.) The portal rift opens for 3 minutes before closing, and its use is sure to attract dimensional horrors from elsewhere on Yellow Sky. Where does the rift lead? Nowhere in the Verge or in human space, that's for sure. Going in is a whole new adventure, one sure to eventually center on finding a way home from an unfriendly place.

of them weren. Other than these peace officers, the colony has no defenders.

SYSTEM LOG

Thing don't always stay the way people want them to. After years of relative safety, the highland colonists have found their way into one of their own darkest nightmares.

THIRTY-FOUR MURDERED IN MOUNT ILLUMINATION HOSPITAL

Only three weeks ago, a dimensional horror appeared in the center of Mount Illumination's small hospital without warning. It then proceeded to eviscerate twenty-four patients, six of the hospital staff, and four police officers that rushed to the scene. This is the second attack by a dimensional horror ever confirmed in the highlands, although rumors of attacks at the rural farms have circulated for years.

Dedicated to the treatment of its citizens and specializing in the care of those suffering from a black fever, the Mount Illumination hospital had no defenses nor even a security staff. The attack brought a horrible death to the mostly incapacitated patients, including the famous xenoarchaelogist Tam Wilson.

BIOLOGIST MISSING

An Orlamu biologist studying means of improving the crops that can be grown on Yellow Sky is missing, say local authorities. Dr. Tierson Whyte was part of a survey team that ventured into the lowlands to study the flora of that part of the biosphere. Dr. Whyte was interested in studying the genetic structure of the plants there.

It is almost an accident that Dr. Whyte discovered a means of improving the yield of highland crops. Principally an ecologist by profession, Dr. Whyte stumbled onto an idea that could add 20-30% to the yield of agricultural land in the upper biosphere. Unfortunately, his duties here

on behalf of his sponsoring organization, the prestigious Orlamu Brookings Foundation, have prevented him from completing his research. His survey team entered the lowlands two weeks ago for a ten-day excursion. They are four days overdue and have not answered any radio messages sent to their basecamp. A search-and-rescue team left a day ago, but have not yet reached the basecamp. An encounter with local fauna has slowed their progress. One of the SAR team was badly injured in the encounter with a "briar rat," an extremely territorial, vaguely rodentlike creature. The team leader has not yet decided whether to return the entire team to Mount Illumination or to split it up, sending part of it back as escort for their injured teammate and continuing the search with the rest.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Prelate Tretal has instituted a program designed to assist her people on Mount Illumination improve their technological skills. Dismayed at the problems encountered thus far by the Orlamu tech teams sent to assist them, the prelate has decided to call for assistance from other Verge systems to complement the efforts of the Orlamu.

Tretal has requested out-of-date technology and training from other Verge systems. Her request went through the Verge Confederation. She was careful to word her request as one designed to add to the Orlamu assistance, not actually to replace it. She admits freely that many of the people of Yellow Sky simply have not developed the technological education required to make the jump to modern equipment and methods.

The prelate welcomes those who wish to assist, but cautions that the market for this equipment and know-how will not likely prove lucrative, as her people are not rich. She does promise a modest compensation, the hospitality of Mount Illumination, and the eager support of the people of Yellow Sky.

STAR DRIVE
ACCESSORY

STAR COMPENDIUM

David Eckelberry

The STAR DRIVE® Campaign Setting sweeps ALTERNITY® game adventurers into one possible future: a bright galaxy shining with humanity's accomplishments but cursed with all of its flaws. The galaxy's attention centers around the Verge, a region a mere one hundred light-years across that is home to thousands of stars awaiting exploration by heroes. The *Star Compendium* brings to life more than a dozen of those star systems.

This accessory includes:

- An updated map of the Verge, accompanied by an overview of the state of the region and its future, as well as a primer on how the Verge colonies relate to one another, and a discussion of how visitors and natives get from place to place.
- An in-depth look at six systems, fleshed out to the level of detail of the major systems in the STAR DRIVE book, offering a mixture of settled worlds (Karnath and Dewi), lost colonies (Vieron and Tychus), fledgling outposts (Talbot), and virgin territory (Eldala).
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